

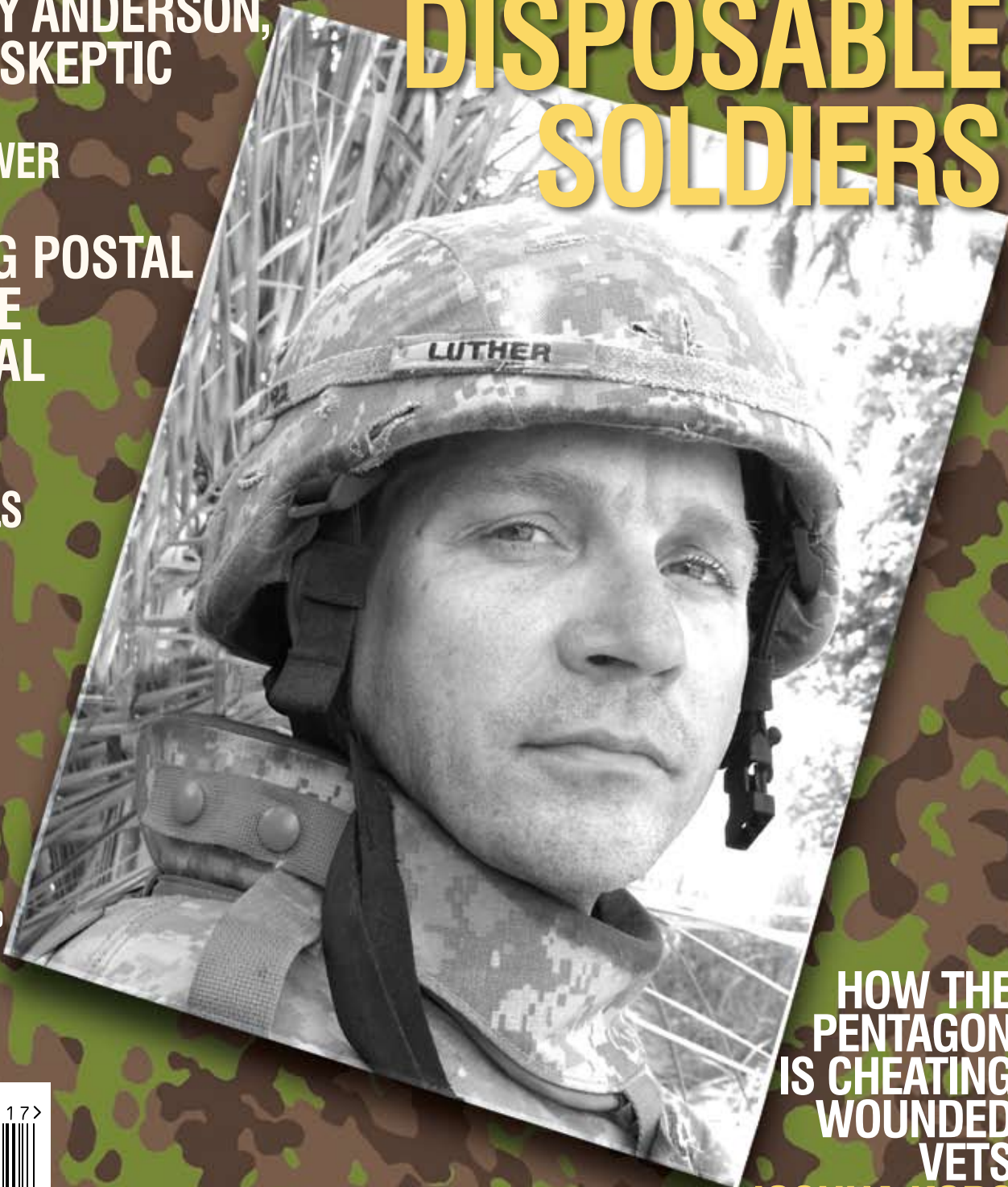
THE Nation.

**PERRY ANDERSON,
EUROSKEPTIC
MARK
MAZOWER**

DISPOSABLE SOLDIERS

**GOING POSTAL
IN THE
DIGITAL
ERA
JOHN
NICHOLS**

APRIL 26, 2010
TheNation.com



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PENTAGON
IS CHEATING
WOUNDED
VETS
JOSHUA KORS**



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Letters

Would Adams Defend Gitmo Detainees?

PIE TOWN, N.M.

I appreciated David Cole's "Lawyers, Terror & Torture" [March 29]. A historical parallel that might add to Cole's well-put points, particularly regarding lawyers defending Guantánamo detainees: John Adams agreed to serve as defense attorney for the British soldiers who fired on Americans in the Boston Massacre. He believed it strengthened the American cause to give the British soldiers a fair trial.

UNCLE RIVER

Community-Based Relief Efforts in Haiti

NEW YORK CITY

Reed Lindsay is right, in "Haiti's Excluded" [March 29], that community involvement in relief efforts is essential to ensuring that aid is delivered safely, efficiently and in a manner that respects the dignity of survivors. But his portrayal of international aid agencies as a monolithic group "run by foreigners who have never been to Haiti" and who are "not reaching out to community-based organizations" is inaccurate. There are dozens of major international aid organizations in Haiti, many of them there for years. In Haiti since 1985, our global organization, Action Against Hunger, has a staff of 520 Haitian public health professionals. We have developed strong ties with local community groups, and it is precisely because of these mutually respectful relationships that we were able to respond quickly to the current crisis.

For example, we work closely with neighborhood committees formed in Port-au-Prince's makeshift camps to identify the most vulnerable families to receive food and other essentials and complete a calm and orderly distribution without armed security. These are the same committees that help us implement a range of programs designed to provide an economic boost to people with vulnerable families, like single parents and those caring for children with disabilities.

NAN DALE, executive director
Action Against Hunger

letters@thenation.com



Helicopters & Solar Panels in NY

WASHINGTON, D.C.

I was disappointed with Miriam Pemberton's March 22 "Swords Into Solar Panels," which mischaracterized the VH-71 presidential helicopter program and ignored the fact that I've led the effort to establish New York as a hub for solar energy R&D and manufacturing.

The presidential helicopter fleet was designed in the 1950s and constructed in the '70s, and all parties agree that a new fleet is needed. Last year, Senator McCain tried to embarrass President Obama by publicly criticizing the cost of the VH-71 program. Obama agreed, and the Pentagon canceled the entire program, even though helicopters had already been constructed, for more than \$3 billion. Other lawmakers and I advocated for a restructured program that would have delivered capable helicopters on time within the original budget. Instead, the Pentagon is pursuing a new program from scratch that will cost up to \$22 billion and take twelve years longer. Meanwhile, the White House will continue to fly a helicopter fleet the Pentagon internally describes as having a "high operational risk."

There were jobs in my district I vehemently defended, but I opposed this senseless decision because it would waste \$15 billion of taxpayers' money and create a safety risk by forcing the current fleet to stay in operation. That's the real VH-71 story.

Pemberton suggests that instead of the helicopter program, solar energy initiatives should take root in New York; this is ironic because I've devoted extraordinary amounts of time to establishing New York State as a solar energy leader. In 2007 I helped coordinate the creation of the Solar Energy Consortium—an industry-driven nonprofit organization partnered with six research institutions—which is working to establish a major solar energy industry cluster in New York. As a result of this initiative, and over \$31 million I've obtained from Congress for it, more than 500 jobs will have been created.

(continued on page 24)

The Surveillance Regime

The recent California federal district court ruling that the Bush administration's warrantless wiretapping violated a 1978 surveillance law was the first significant judicial rebuke

to post-9/11 government eavesdropping. For that reason alone, Judge Vaughn Walker's damages award to the Muslim charity Al-Haramain and its attorneys, targets of unlawful spying in 2004, is worthy of celebration. But the ruling won't change our current deeply troubling surveillance regime. In that sense, it is a timely reminder of unfinished business.

Ever since Barack Obama took office, accountability for rights violations during the "war on terror" has been thin. Victims of wrongful overseas detention, surveillance and torture have received no apology and no reparations. Despite an early commitment to close Guantánamo, 183 prisoners remain there. Indeed, Obama has released fewer detainees than Bush did during his last year in office. And despite an early promise to protect the First Amendment rights of Muslim charities, Obama has done nothing to change the onerous application of terrorism financing laws. Walker's decision is only the second to have ruled against the so-called Terrorist Surveillance Program. All other challenges—including one against the odious 2008 FISA Amendments Act (FAA), which *The Nation* has joined as a plaintiff—ultimately got booted at the courthouse door.

Even if Walker's opinion survives possible appeal, it will have no effect on the broad surveillance powers unleashed by the FAA, which passed with then-Senator Obama's support. Under that law, the government can dispense with individualized warrants, the cornerstone of Fourth Amendment privacy protections. Absent meaningful judicial review, we simply can't know how much surveillance the government is carrying out.

EDITORIAL

Continuity, not change, has characterized the conduct of Eric Holder's Justice Department. Walker documents, in his opinion, the government's persistent "refusal to cooperate with the court's orders," its improper use of procedural delays and even point-blank refusals to produce information. Yes, this was business as usual during the Bush era. But Walker was talking about events on Obama's watch.

Nor is Walker's experience unusual. In lawsuits by survivors of the CIA's "black sites" and Guantánamo's interrogation rooms, the government either keeps insisting that "state secrets" require outright dismissal or has stuck to the canard that noncitizens forcibly brought into US custody overseas lack all constitutional rights. In Guantánamo litigation, habeas lawyers complain about obfuscation, secrecy and delay not dissimilar from what they faced in the Bush era.

Blaming the lawyers is easy. But it is the otherwise near-absolute absence of accountability that makes Walker's opinion such a lonely beacon. This absence is, in large part, a result of the Obama administration's failure to explain to the American people that the surveillance program violated the Constitution, and that unlawful and futile torture was rife in Guantánamo and the black sites.

It is not too late to win the political, or the moral, battle. It is not too late to use the bully pulpit of the presidency to explain that reckless and illegal incursions into privacy rights are no road to security. It is only by taking on that battle that the Obama administration, and not just a handful of voices on the federal bench, can produce the real change its lawyers have been fighting.



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Hamid Karzai's Rebellion

In the 1960s, Grace Slick of Jefferson Airplane sang, in "White Rabbit," about when "the men on the chessboard get up and tell you where to go." Now, in a surreal, through-the-looking-glass moment, President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan, the almost classic definition of a pawn, has done exactly that. In a series of angry, frustrated outbursts,

COMMENT

Karzai has declared that the United States is acting like an invader and occupier, that "there is a thin curtain between invasion and cooperation-assistance," that the heavy-handed US and NATO military operations could transform the insurgency into a "national resistance" and that he himself might throw in his lot with the Taliban. He said, not without reason, that the Obama administration was trying to undercut his efforts to reach a settlement with the Taliban. And an Afghan who attended a meeting with Karzai told the *New York Times*, "He believes that America is trying to dominate the region, and that he is the only one who can stand up to them."

The idea that the urbane Karzai, educated in India, might join the Taliban is highly unlikely. Installed in 2001 with US support, Karzai has acquired a well-deserved reputation for tolerating rampant corruption and for making power-sharing deals with violent warlords. And he was almost universally accused of engineering widespread fraud during his re-election bid last August. Still, he has a point, and although he is at best an imperfect vehicle to represent nationalist opinion, Karzai is accurately reflecting the feelings of an increasing number of Afghans about the US occupation, now in its ninth year—feelings no doubt inflamed by recent Afghan government allegations that US Special Operations forces tampered with evidence to cover up their killing of civilian women near Gardez.

Karzai has also launched, apparently without US support, a significant peace initiative. Earlier this year he unexpectedly declared that he would seek to reconcile with top-level Taliban leaders, and he announced his intent to convene a tribal *jirga*, or council, in May to discuss how to bring the Taliban back into Afghan political life. In March Karzai met with representatives of one of the three main insurgent groups, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Islamic Party, whose delegates presented a peace plan predicated on a negotiable withdrawal date for US and NATO forces. The plan, according to the delegation, was also acceptable to the main Taliban leadership.

Despite the oft-repeated claim by US government officials that the war has no military solution, Washington has offered little or no support for Karzai's peace efforts. Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called Karzai's meetings with Hekmatyar's representatives "premature." American officials have long insisted that US troops must first deliver punishing blows to the Taliban before talks are considered. The Pentagon has telegraphed its plans to launch an all-out offensive to seize control of Taliban-dominated Kandahar beginning in June, following hard upon its mini-offensive to oust the Taliban from Marja, a key district in Helmand province.

But the news on the military front isn't good. Despite the

Noted.

A TEST FOR LABOR: As *The Nation* goes to press, the death toll of a devastating explosion at the **Upper Big Branch Mine** in West Virginia has reached twenty-five. The blast was so severe that many of the dead have yet to be identified, and four miners remain unaccounted for. The grief in this small coal-mining community south of Charleston is likely compounded by the very real possibility that the accident was preventable.

In March alone the mine, a nonunion facility owned by **Massey Energy**, was cited by the **Mine Safety and Health Administration** (MSHA) for fifty-three safety violations. For example, new communications equipment that would enable rescuers to pinpoint the location of potential survivors, required by legislation passed in the wake of the 2006 Sago disaster, was only “partially installed.” That law also stiffened penalties, to which mine operators responded with an avalanche of appeals, the subject of a February House Labor Committee hearing, where MSHA’s new head, **Joe Main**, testified that 82,000 safety violations have piled up, awaiting remedy. Committee chair **George Miller** speculated at the time, “Perhaps this process is protecting those with the worst records.”

Massey may have just proved Miller right: of nearly \$900,000 in MSHA fines issued last year at Upper Big Branch—hundreds of them for safety violations considered “significant and substantial”—Massey has contested more than 80 percent. As long as those fines are being challenged, points out **Phil Smith**, a spokesman for the **United Mine Workers**, MSHA is blocked from taking further action, such as putting Massey’s mine on a list of pattern offenders, which would trigger rigorous intervention.

Despite this atrocious foot-dragging, Massey CEO **Don Blankenship** had the gall to claim to a West Virginia radio station that neither MSHA nor state regulators “would have allowed the mine to operate if it were thought to be unsafe.” In December 2008 Massey was slapped with the largest coal-mining safety fines in history, totaling \$4.2 million, and the company pleaded guilty to criminal charges in the deaths of two

miners at another West Virginia mine in 2006. In filing suit against Massey, the widows of those miners uncovered a 2005 memo that revealed Blankenship’s open hostility to safety measures. “If any of you have been asked by your...engineers or anyone else to do anything other than run coal,” the memo to mine supervisors read, “you need to ignore them and run coal.”

The West Virginia explosion, the deadliest mining disaster since 1984, is the first major test for Obama’s new Labor Department. Secretary **Hilda Solis** has promised to investigate and “take action.” But that means she and Main will either have to find a way to hold reckless operators like Massey accountable in the face of a crippling appeals process—or push Congress to pass a new mining bill that will close the lethal loopholes.

ESTHER KAPLAN

COLLATERAL MURDER COVER-UP? Peace Action’s **Kevin Martin** reminds us, “The fall of Baghdad in early April 2003 is widely held by Iraqis to mark the beginning of the US occupation of Iraq. Seven years later, we have fulfilled very few of the promises we made in the months leading up to war, but we have brought death, destruction and displacement.” Unfortunately, with major media largely withdrawn from Iraq—even if US troops and contractors are not—the true picture of the occupation is seldom shown. Thanks to **WikiLeaks.org**, however, we’ve got a better sense of the high cost of empire.

WikiLeaks, a three-year-old new-media project that operates off a Swedish-hosted website (in Sweden, journalists cannot be forced to reveal sources), publishes and comments on leaked documents revealing government and corporate misconduct. Having withstood corporate and government pressures, including gag orders, the site has gained a reputation as a news outlet that protects sources and gets stories out. And WikiLeaks got a big one when a source from within the US military anonymously leaked an encrypted video of one of the most controversial incidents to take place during the occupation of Iraq. The site’s small editorial staff used **Twitter** to solicit decryption help from computer specialists, verified what it had and created a special **collateralmurder.com** website to circulate the video.

What more than 2 million visitors to the site in its first two days saw was a 2007 video showing US helicopter pilots firing on unarmed civilians, including a **Reuters** photographer and his driver. Surveying the dead bodies below, one of the pilots exclaims, “Nice!” At the time of the incident, a military spokesman claimed the pilots were “clearly engaged in combat operations against a hostile force.” But as the **Committee to Protect Journalists** says, “The video raises questions about the actions of US military forces and the thoroughness and transparency of the investigation that followed.” Congress needs to ask those questions and demand answers from the Pentagon—and Bush White House aides—about who knew what, when and whether there was a cover-up of killings that do not appear to have been either “nice” or justified.

JOHN NICHOLS

SIMON & SIMON: Illinois lieutenant governors have a way of becoming Illinois governors. The current governor, Democrat **Pat Quinn**, moved up from the state’s number-two job after **Rod Blagojevich** was impeached. Blagojevich is still under investigation, but his predecessor, Republican **George Ryan**, is in federal prison; and Ryan was the third Illinois governor since 1968 to be convicted of white-collar crimes.

No one expects Quinn, a clean-government advocate, to get in trouble. But it’s reassuring that he has picked as his running mate a savvy reformer who happens to be the heir to one of the state’s (and nation’s) most honorable political names. **Sheila Simon**, a law professor and veteran local elected official in southern Illinois, learned about politics campaigning for her dad, the late Senator **Paul Simon**. And she retains his liberal values (she’s an outspoken advocate for same-sex marriage, education investments and fair taxation) and faith in the value of public service. In a season of government-bashing and compromise—not just by “party of no” Republicans but by “party of should know better” Democrats—Simon says, “I don’t believe that government is the enemy, and I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that. I come from a tradition of understanding that government can serve the people.”

JOHN NICHOLS

trumpeting of the supposed US victory in Marja—touted as the first concrete demonstration of the effectiveness of the surge of 30,000-plus troops ordered by Obama in December—the situation there is fast unraveling. The Taliban's shadow governor for the region has come back, and the insurgents have “re-seized control and the momentum,” according to Maj. James Coffin, a US civil affairs leader in the area. “The Taliban are everywhere,” a tribal elder told a reporter on the scene. The United States can't afford too many victories like Marja.

Karzai reportedly opposed the Marja offensive. In early April he told tribal elders in Kandahar—where his brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, heads the provincial council—that he isn't enthusiastic about the planned US attack there either. Ahmed Wali, a notoriously corrupt wheeler-dealer and reputed drug kingpin, also maintains quiet links to Taliban officials. Such ties would be important, perhaps crucial, if there is any hope of a negotiated deal. But astonishingly, a US military officer recently threatened Ahmed Wali with death if he's caught talking to the Taliban.

What does it mean when the president of the country the United States is occupying says he might join the insurgency? What does it mean when a US officer threatens to kill the president's brother for meeting with the insurgents? What does it mean when the president opposes major military offensives launched by the occupying power? Here's what it means: that the US enterprise in Afghanistan is hopelessly misguided.

It's possible the United States is the only player that doesn't realize that its strategy can't work. Karzai is angling for a deal, although whether he can survive in a post-American Afghanistan is open to question. The Taliban and their allies, including Hekmatyar's Islamic Party, are exploring their options for a political accord. Likewise, India and Pakistan, the two key outside players in Afghanistan's drama, are maneuvering to gain advantage.

Pakistan, of course, created the Taliban in the 1990s as a cat's paw for extending influence in Afghanistan. Since then the Pakistani army and intelligence service have maintained not-so-covert ties to the Taliban, and they continue to see the organiza-

tion as a potential ally even though they have arrested some key leaders recently as a result of US pressure. India, for its part, long supported Karzai's allies in the old anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. But recently the startling news emerged that New Delhi is making plans to open direct lines to the Taliban. That could mean India does not want to cede to Pakistan the sole power to bring the Taliban to the bargaining table.

In his December speech announcing the surge, Obama declared that US forces would begin to withdraw in July 2011. Whether or not he holds to that date, all of the region's players are making plans based on the notion that the occupation can't last much longer. It certainly can't be sustained much longer in the United States politically—the burden it places on the budget in a time of economic crisis and vast deficits is too great, and the likelihood of quick battlefield successes is diminishing. Though Obama has already carried out two major reviews of Afghan policy, it's time for a third. And this one has to center on the question of how to engage all of the stakeholders in Afghanistan's tragedy in search of a political accord.

ROBERT DREYFUSS

Robert Dreyfuss is a Nation contributing editor.

Left & Right Against War

It may seem hard to believe now, in the aftermath of the thunderous partisan rhetoric accompanying the vote on the healthcare bill, but in mid-February small sections of the right and left found major points of unity. The subject was Empire. Specifically, the crisis of the American Empire.

The participants, meeting in a Washington hotel conference room, ranged from *Nation* editor Katrina vanden Heuvel to her counterpart at *The American Conservative*, Daniel McCarthy. *The Nation's* William Greider was there, as was Ralph Nader, assorted left-wing peaceniks and Cato-niks and former advisers to Gary Hart, Robert Taft Jr. and Ronald Reagan—along with various others, including your intrepid reporter.

The meeting took place, auspiciously, the day after the Conservative Political Action Conference, at which Representative Ron Paul stole the show with denunciations of war (punctuated by a defense of Eugene Debs against his persecutor Woodrow Wilson!). *Nation* readers may not have noticed, but no unhappy neocon was likely to have missed the fact that in the CPAC presidential straw poll, Paul came in first. The next day, at the conference on Empire, sponsored by Voters for Peace, college activists from Paul's Young Americans for Liberty sat cheek by jowl with a current SDSer from the University of Maryland. They described a lot of common grievances.

The specter in the room was the exploding national debt.

For the first time since Robert “Mr. Republican” Taft and Progressive leader Henry Wallace opposed the Big Security State sixty years ago, the all-devouring Pentagon budget could be identified as a common enemy. Another was the financialization of the economy. Together the bankers and the military chiefs—along with their bipartisan enablers in Congress and the White

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Explaining Michael Steele

So what, pray tell, could be the deal
With RNC chair Michael Steele?
Republicans would like to know
Just why this guy spends so much dough.
The answer's really not bizarre:
He simply wants to be a star.
Just witness, please, at what great rate
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Life, liberty and the pursuit of "Cleanliness"

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By June Fleming

Remember the feeling you had when you drew a hot bath, sat down in the tub, and let the warm water wash away the cares of the day? After the bath, you emerged refreshed, rejuvenated and ready to go. For many people, the luxury of taking a bath has become a thing of the past as age and mobility issues have robbed them of one of life's simple pleasures. Now, the leader in finding innovative products for Boomers and Beyond has found a product that can get you back in the water again, safely and affordably. It's called the Designed for SENIORS® SafeStep Walk-In Tub, and we'd love to tell you about it.

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House—have been emptying out the hard-built productive economy and launching one pointless war after another, followed by occupation after occupation.

It was a remarkable thing, then, to hear from both sides of the table the growing resentment over dilemmas so long disguised as the other party's fault. The "nobodies" on the left and right, described as irrelevant and unwanted in Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s 1949 cold war classic *The Vital Center*, were talking again.

This is not to exaggerate the ability of any disempowered group of intellectuals, editors and sympathetic organizers to alter the policies of the major parties, let alone change foreign policy or military strategy—or to minimize a host of differences over domestic issues as dear to the left as to the right.

But it didn't take too much effort for *Progressive Review* editor and veteran peacenik Sam Smith to recall examples in which such coalitions had actually had an effect. Community groups against highway expansion or big civic projects using tax money for tourist destinations (from sports arenas to convention centers) have included left-right coalitions. Generations earlier, as the "Sons of the Wild Jackass," Progressives across party lines united behind Franklin Roosevelt for social programs while muckraking the death merchants and bankers and their role in dragging the United States into World War I. Still earlier, in the American Anti-Imperialist League, Boston Brahmins and some of America's most prestigious novelists, along with *The Nation's* founding editor, E.L. Godkin, tried to halt the murderous US invasion of the Philippines. Some of us at the conference were conscious of following in the footsteps of Mark Twain.

We were also aware of polls that regularly show large majorities against war, majorities regularly ignored in the big media (not you, Rachel Maddow) when they are not demeaned on the op-ed pages by Vital Centrists like Thomas Friedman and David Brooks. More urgently, we were following our own instincts. Here in my Upper Midwest (Wisconsin), it seemed Obama crossed the finish line ahead of McCain because of Republican abstentions, including lifelong GOP loyalists and military families. They were sick of these wars, and of George W. Bush. They were not likely to be less sickened by escalation in Afghanistan, and not likely to avoid voting against the president who sent troops one more time into the pit of Empire.

One immediate and striking difference in that conference room was that rage at Bush was not matched by anger at Obama. We on the left were still in mourning, perhaps more accurately in shock, since the president's right turn over Honduras and Plan Colombia, and his assertions of American right and responsibility to make life and death for anyone and everyone else on the planet. Some of us still nursed the hope that the promise of an Obama Era of Good Neighbors would be redeemed.

Here, at least, our paleocon friends had the better of us. We had been too credulous, perhaps because we had lost the critical edge of our younger years. The disappointments suffered around the world echo the unraveling of what the New Left analyzed as "corporate liberalism." But it was not conservatives or the New Left that pulled apart that project; it was the Vietnam War and all that it represented. Liberalism's comeback, with global policies unchanged, has been a retread, and just as worn as any other old tire.

The Washington conversation didn't get to the ecological angle of global militarization, but it is easy to see how the US-backed spraying of Colombia's Naya River Valley and its indigenous tribes offers, along with the narco-nirvana of Afghanistan, more terrible examples. So long as the American Empire gives first place to maintaining control, questions raised by narcotics networks seem unanswerable.

When it comes to the military budget, however, peacenik right and left are on the same side, stridently against the budget-busting center. Without serious reductions in that budget and in its disbursement in every corner of the world resource market, we will almost certainly have reached a premature end to the Obama promise. Conservatives, and not just these conservatives, would like to dump him; the rest of us would like to see him driven to do the right thing. Can the emerging peacenik dialogue between right and left make a difference? The odds are great, but it was a good beginning.

PAUL BUHLE

Paul Buhle, who is retired from Brown University, edits nonfiction comics volumes. His latest are Studs Terkel's Working: A Graphic Adaptation and FDR and the New Deal for Beginners.

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New York Times journalist **David Carr** calls the idea that good watchdog media can be publicly funded "frankly preposterous" in the video **Government Funding Cannot Save Journalism**.



In **A Visit With Salam Fayyad**, Letty Cottin Pogrebin asks whether the prime minister of the Palestinian Authority is a "radical bean counter" or the savior of the two-state solution.



Tom Engelhardt and Jonathan Schell discuss the dilemma of nuclear weaponry in the Obama era, in **America's Nuclear Trajectory**.



Watch Christopher Hayes and Rachel Maddow discuss the political strategy behind President Obama's decision to ease restrictions on offshore oil drilling in **Offshore Drilling—in Exchange for What?**



Offering banks incentives to prevent foreclosures isn't working. The Obama administration needs to start mandating mortgage modifications, writes Greg Kaufmann in **Voluntary Foreclosure Prevention Fails to Deliver**.

Eric Alterman

Don't Cry for David Frum

David Frum makes an extremely inconvenient martyr for liberals. Forced out of his cushy sinecure at the American Enterprise Institute, he will continue to be fabulously rich, thanks to his marriage to a Canadian newspaper heiress. His voice will be magnified in the national discourse, and tributes to his courage will dot the landscape of American political discourse for weeks to come.

But forget about Frum for a minute and take a look at why he was let go. Frum remains a right-winger. He has not renounced his former self for coming up with the bankrupt concept of the “axis of evil” in service to the Bush administration’s propaganda push for its disastrous, dishonest invasion of Iraq. (Frum’s tome *An End to Evil*, written with Richard Perle, will one day serve historians as a near-perfect exhibit for the self-serving intellectual vacuity of Bush-era hubris.) And he has strongly opposed the Obama administration, both at home and abroad, particularly its healthcare reforms.

No, Frum was drummed out of what is, sadly, the conservative movement’s most prestigious quasi-academic perch not for any recognizable form of philosophical or theological apostasy. Rather, it was for stating the obvious: that perhaps GOP leaders had screwed up their healthcare fight because they were listening to the wrong people, and hence doing the wrong things.

Way back on December 2, 1993, when William Kristol was still pretty much a nobody with a famous dad and a good-news/bad-news reputation as Dan Quayle’s chief attack dog and press leaker, he circulated a four-page memo to Republican leaders warning of the dangers lurking in President Clinton’s proposed comprehensive healthcare bill. True, the tone of his musings was a great deal friendlier to Republican muckety-mucks than that of Frum. “Nothing in these pages is intended to supplant the many thoughtful analyses of the Clinton health care plan already produced by Republicans and others,” Kristol wrote. Even so, his warning presaged that made by Frum today. Should the Democrats pass their bill, he cautioned, their success would “revive the reputation of the party that spends and regulates, the Democrats, as the generous protector of middle-class interests. And it will at the same time strike a punishing blow against Republican claims to defend the middle class by restraining government.”

Last year Kristol—now a Republican kingmaker, *Weekly Standard* founder and editor, Fox News commentator, columnist for the *Washington Post* and previously for *Time* and the *New York Times* (all this despite an atrocious record of analysis regarding Iraq and a willingness to run intellectual interference for the likes of Sarah Palin)—repeated the same argument regarding Obama’s plan. On the *Weekly Standard* website, he informed his troops: “My advice, for what it’s worth: Resist the temptation. This is no time to pull punches. Go for the kill.” He was echoing the advice

of Senator Jim DeMint, who had opined, “If we’re able to stop Obama on this, it will be his Waterloo. It will break him.”

OK, so that didn’t work out so well. Kristol, with Gumby-like flexibility, managed to reformulate DeMint’s Waterloo metaphor into something far more complicated, tripping up even himself in the process. In the aftermath of defeat, he cast Obama as Louis Napoleon as depicted in the opening of Karl Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire*. I lack the space to do justice to the inspired nuttiness of this argument, but suffice it to say that no one will ever maintain that the problem with William Kristol was an unswerving commitment to principle or clarity.

Pretty much everybody else on the right flipped as well once it became clear that Obama would pursue reconciliation to get his votes. Suddenly, Republicans were arguing that victory, not defeat, was what would prove to be the Democrats’ Waterloo. As Obama joked to Congressional Democrats right before the vote, “Now, it could be that they are suddenly having a change of heart and they are deeply concerned about their Democratic friends. They are giving you the best possible advice in order to assure that Nancy Pelosi remains speaker and Harry Reid remains leader and that all of you keep your seats. That’s a possibility...”

So when Frum published his now-infamous blog post attacking GOP leaders for fealty to the “hysterical accusations and pseudo-information” of the right’s loudmouth know-nothings on cable and talk-radio, he was operating on the same strategic assumptions conservatives were spouting until they realized they were about to lose. But unlike Kristol and company, he refused to engage in the intellectual acrobatics necessary to repudiate his arguments of five minutes ago.

As Frum explained, the problem was the abdication of Republicans’ intellectual leadership to the folks at talk-radio and Fox News. “Republicans originally thought that Fox worked for us, and now we are discovering we work for Fox,” he told ABC News, echoing an argument made in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, that Roger Ailes is “without close contest the most powerful Republican in the country today.” (Personally, I might put him just behind Rush Limbaugh, with Glenn Beck, Sean Hannity and Bill Kristol barking just a few lengths behind.) Healthcare, Frum argued, was a “huge win for the conservative entertainment industry,” but for “the cause they purport to represent, it’s Waterloo all right: ours.”

The upshot of this tawdry affair—as with the less celebrated firing of Bruce Bartlett from the conservative National Center for Policy Analysis after he dissented from ruinous Bush-era budget policies—is, um, Kristol-clear. The rule of Roger and Rush will go unchallenged. No forms of deviation from the consensus of the conservative chatterboxes will be tolerated, no matter how trivial. AEI, like the rest of the conservative movement, will operate on the same basis Joseph Stalin legendarily used when he heard something he didn’t like: “no person, no problem.” ■



Gary Younge

Labour's Fighting Chance

In a period of extreme economic volatility, 2010 was supposed to hold some electoral certainties. To the extent that elections in Western democracies are about choices—a debatable proposition—the decision had been made before a single ballot was cast. This was the conservatives' year. Every mainstream pundit called it; every poll confirmed it. The vote would be a mere formality. The debate, such as it was, revolved not around the likelihood of a right-wing victory but the scale of the liberal defeat. As winter turned to spring, however, new possibilities sprouted, and the electoral landscape was drastically transformed. By Easter, center-left fortunes had risen from the dead. By the time Passover had come and gone, conventional wisdom had rarely seemed less wise.

I refer not to commentary about the Obama administration in the run-up to the midterms but Gordon Brown's forthcoming election in Britain, announced on April 6. An election that was long assumed to be a foregone conclusion has turned into an extremely close contest. Six months ago Labour was seventeen points behind in the polls and heading for a rout; today it trails by as low as four points and is in serious contention.

Labour currently has a majority of fifty-six. No one expects it to maintain that. But it is now perfectly possible that it will emerge as the largest party in a hung Parliament, where no party has an overall majority. If the Conservatives do win—still the most likely scenario—polls suggest it will be with a wafer-thin majority.

With more than a quarter of voters still to make up their minds and a resurgent third party—Liberal Democrats—the result could turn on a handful of votes in a handful of places. One in eight seats needs just a 5 percent swing to change hands, and these are fairly evenly distributed among the parties. With the first-ever televised debates, the scope for dramatic blunders that could alter the course of events is significant.

But for now, this is not only a much better situation for Labour than most expected; it's much better than the party deserves. Tony Blair left Downing Street with a Hail Mary pass. Languishing in the polls, riven with internal schisms, mired in sleaze, with interest rates rising and Iraq still in chaos, Labour had just been hammered in local elections.

Brown offered not a change in policies but in personnel. He supported the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and as chancellor was primarily responsible for the government's economic course, which had lifted many out of poverty but widened the gap between rich and poor. After a brief honeymoon, the party continued its precipitous downward trajectory. Attempts by Blair supporters to oust Brown damaged him but could not dislodge him. The country sought a change in direction. But without Blair's presentational skills, Brown could not even put

a good face on it. The New Labour pig was headed for the slaughter without lipstick.

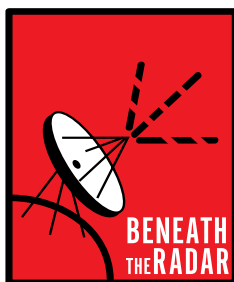
So what happened? Two developments are broadly responsible for the turnaround. First, voters took a harder look at the Conservatives and didn't like what they saw. This was not for want of trying. With a new, young leader, David Cameron, and a less xenophobic agenda, the Tories have made a great effort to shed their reputation as the "nasty party." But they seemed to relish the prospect of slashing public spending, made a series of gaffes and have struggled to shake off the image of being the party of the rich (Cameron went to Eton and Oxford, where he was a member of the Bullingdon Club—an exclusive high-society fraternity whose members routinely drank themselves into a stupor, trashed the restaurants that hosted them, then paid for the damage in full, in cash).

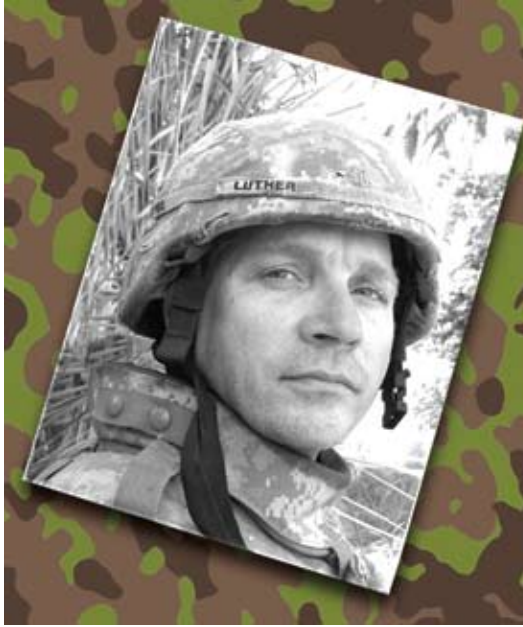
Second, for the first time in two decades Labour took a look over its left shoulder and realized what could be gained. In the past two years it has raised taxes on the rich, and in March it raised the transfer tax on expensive houses to subsidize first-time buyers. In 2006 Brown had praised bankers for inventing "the most modern instruments of finance." A year later he thanked them for creating "an era that history will record as the beginning of a new Golden Age." Within a year the financial system was in collapse. Now he is the primary advocate for a global tax on banks that could reap billions a year. "The relationship between banks and society has to change," he told the *Financial Times* recently.

There are important lessons for the Democrats here. The right is far more adept at scaring swing voters than at convincing them—and the more likely you are to deliver for your base, the more likely it is to deliver for you.

But these comparisons can only go so far. The British middle class, like its American counterpart, is struggling, but it has less antipathy to state intervention. When asked whether the primary responsibility for solving social and economic problems lies with the individual or the government, 62 percent of the middle quintile of earners said the government, according to a 2009 Trade Union Congress poll. More than half said the government should redistribute money from the rich to the poor.

For all that, both main parties promise to slash public spending, continue occupying Afghanistan and pursue the most aggressive attacks on civil liberties in the Western world. The narrow margins in the polls reflect narrow margins in ideology. Whoever wins will do so with a depressed turnout and the backdrop of a sharp rise in votes for the extreme right. If the Liberal Democrats hold the balance of power, they will probably insist on a referendum on proportional representation, bringing to an end the winner-take-all system and hopefully paving the way for a viable left alternative. It matters who wins, but not that much, which is just as well because whoever wins will not win by much. ■





DISPOSABLE SOLDIERS

HOW THE PENTAGON IS CHEATING WOUNDED VETS

JOSHUA KORS

The mortar shell that wrecked Chuck Luther's life exploded at the base of the guard tower. Luther heard the brief whistling, followed by a flash of fire, a plume of smoke and a deafening bang that shook the tower and threw him to the floor. The Army sergeant's head slammed against the concrete, and he lay there in the Iraqi heat, his nose leaking clear fluid.

"I remember laying there in a daze, looking around, trying to figure out where I was at," he says. "I was nauseous. My teeth hurt. My shoulder hurt. And my right ear was killing me." Luther picked himself up and finished his shift, then took some ibuprofen to dull the pain. The sergeant was seven months into his deployment at Camp Taji, in the volatile Sunni Triangle, twenty miles north of Baghdad. He was determined, he says, to complete his mission. But the short, muscular frame that had guided him to twenty-two honors—including three Army Achievement Medals and a Combat Action Badge—was basically broken. The shoulder pain persisted, and the hearing in his right ear, which evaporated on impact, never returned, replaced by the maddening hum of tinnitus.

Then came the headaches. "They'd start with a speckling in the corner of my vision, then grow worse and worse until finally the right eye would just shut down and go blank," he says. "The left one felt like someone was stabbing me over and over in the eye."

Doctors at Camp Taji's aid station told Luther he was faking his symptoms. When he insisted he wasn't, they presented a new diagnosis for his blindness: personality disorder.

"To be told that I was lying, that was a real smack in the face," says Luther. "Then when they said 'personality disorder,' I was really confused. I didn't understand how a problem with my personality could cause deafness or blindness or shoulder pain."

For three years *The Nation* has been reporting on military doctors' fraudulent use of personality disorder to discharge wounded soldiers [see Kors, "How Specialist Town Lost His Benefits," April 9, 2007]. PD is a severe mental illness that emerges during childhood and is listed in military regulations

as a pre-existing condition, not a result of combat. Thus those who are discharged with PD are denied a lifetime of disability benefits, which the military is required to provide to soldiers wounded during service. Soldiers discharged with PD are also denied long-term medical care. And they have to give back a slice of their re-enlistment bonus. That amount is often larger than the soldier's final paycheck. As a result, on the day of their discharge, many injured vets learn that they owe the Army several thousand dollars.

According to figures from the Pentagon and a Harvard University study, the military is saving billions by discharging soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan with personality disorder.

In July 2007 the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs called a hearing to investigate PD discharges. Barack Obama, then a senator, put forward a bill to halt all PD discharges. And before leaving office, President Bush signed a law requiring the defense secretary to conduct his own investigation of the PD discharge system. But Obama's bill did not pass, and the Defense Department concluded that no soldiers had been wrongly discharged. The PD dismissals have continued. Since 2001 more than 22,600 soldiers have been discharged with personality disorder. That number includes soldiers who have served two and three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"This should have been resolved during the Bush administration. And it should have been stopped now by the Obama administration," says Paul Sullivan, executive director of Veterans for Common Sense. "The fact that it hasn't is a national disgrace."

On Capitol Hill, the fight is not over. In October four senators wrote a letter to President Obama to underline their continuing concern over PD discharges. The president, almost three years after presenting his personality disorder bill, says he remains concerned as well.

Veterans' leaders say they're particularly disturbed by Luther's case because it highlights the severe consequences a soldier can face if he questions his diagnosis and opposes his PD discharge.

Luther insisted to doctors at Camp Taji that he did not have personality disorder, that the idea of developing a childhood

mental illness at the age of 36, after passing eight psychological screenings, was ridiculous. The sergeant used a vivid expression to convey how much pain he was in. "I told them that some days, the pain was so bad, I felt like dying." Doctors declared him a suicide risk. They collected his shoelaces, his belt and his rifle and ordered him confined to an isolation chamber.

Extensive medical records written by Luther's doctors document his confinement in the aid station for more than a month. The sergeant was kept under twenty-four-hour guard. Most nights, he says, guards enforced sleep deprivation, keeping the lights on and blasting heavy metal music. When Luther rebelled, he was pinned down and injected with sleeping medication.

Eventually Luther was brought to his commander, who told him he had a choice: he could sign papers saying his medical problems stemmed from personality disorder or face more time in isolation.

'Every Night It Was Megadeth'

Luther entered the Army in 1988, following in the footsteps of his grandfathers, both decorated World War II veterans. In 2005, after Hurricane Katrina, he and his unit were deployed to New Orleans, where he helped evacuate residents and dispose of bodies left in the street. In 2006 he was deployed from Fort Hood in Texas to Camp Taji, where he performed reconnaissance with the First Squadron, Seventh Cavalry Regiment, led by Maj. Christopher Wehri. "Luther was older and more mature than most of the soldiers. He was forthcoming, very polite," says Wehri. "He seemed to have a good head on his shoulders."

Doctors at the aid station didn't see him that way. Following the May 2007 mortar attack, Luther entered the base's clinic and described his concussion symptoms to Capt. Aaron Dewees. Dewees, a pediatrician charged with caring for soldiers in the 1-7 Cavalry, grew suspicious of Luther's self-report. "It is my professional opinion," Dewees wrote in his medical records, "that Sgt. Charles F. Luther Jr. has been misrepresenting himself and his self-described medical conditions for secondary gain." The doctor suggested that Luther was faking his ailments to avoid reconnaissance duty. He called the sergeant "narcissistic" and said Luther's descriptions of his injuries were a mixture of "exaggeration and flat-out fabrication."

Luther's medical records document severe nosebleeds and "sharp and burning" pain. Still, the sergeant says he could sense that his doctors didn't believe him. It was at that point—frustrated, plagued by blinding migraines—that he spoke of pain so severe he wished he were dead. "I made clear that I was not going to kill myself, that it was just a colorful expression to explain how much pain I was in." Dewees agreed. In their records, Luther's doctors note a "suicide gesture" and "'off-handed' comments" that the sergeant was going to kill himself, but Dewees said those gestures were "unlikely to have been a serious attempt" at self-harm. Nonetheless, Dewees wrote, such statements "must be taken seriously and treated as such," that

Luther "remains a threat to himself and others given his need for attention, narcissistic tendencies and impulsive behavior."

Luther was taken to an isolation chamber and told this was his new sleeping quarters. The room, which Luther captured on his digital camera, served as a walk-in closet. It was slightly larger than an Army cot and was crammed with cardboard boxes, a desk and a bedpan. Through a small, cracked window, he could look out onto the base. Through the open doorway, the sergeant was monitored by armed guards.

Both Dewees and Lt. Col. Larry Applewhite, an aid station social worker, declared Luther mentally ill, suffering from a personality disorder. The next step was to remove him from the military as fast as possible. "It is strongly recommended that Sgt. Luther be administratively separated via Chapter 5-13," wrote Applewhite, citing the official discharge code for personality disorder. In a separate statement, Dewees endorsed the 5-13 discharge and urged that it be handled rapidly. "I feel the safest course of action," he wrote, "is to expedite his departure from theater."

That didn't happen. For more than a month Luther remained in his six-by-eight-foot isolation chamber, weeks he describes as "the hardest of my life." He says the guards would ridicule him and most nights enforced sleep deprivation, keeping the lights on all night and using a nearby Xbox and TV speakers to blast heavy metal into his room. "Every night it was Megadeth, Saliva, Disturbed." The sergeant pulled a blanket over his head to block out the noise and the light, but it was no use.

"They told me I wasn't a real soldier, that I was a piece of crap. All I wanted was to be treated for my injuries. Now suddenly I'm not a soldier. I'm a prisoner, by my own people," says Luther, his voice tightening. "I felt like a caged animal in that room. That's when I started to lose it."

Isolated, exhausted, the sergeant who had been confined for being mentally ill says he began feeling exactly that. Finally Luther snapped. He stepped out of his room and was walking toward a senior official's office when an altercation broke out. In the ensuing scuffle, Luther bit one of his guards, then spit in the face of the aid station chaplain. The sergeant was pinned to the floor and injected with five milligrams of Haldol, an antipsychotic medication. Sedated, Luther was returned to isolation.

Staff Sgt. James Byington, who was serving at Camp Taji with the 1-7 Cavalry, walked the half-mile to the aid station to visit his fellow soldier. Byington says that off the battlefield, Sergeant Luther was "animated and peppy," the comedian of the chow hall. During combat, he says, Luther was focused and prepared, a key component in a farmland raid just outside Taji that discovered a cache of weapons and money. The man he found in the isolation chamber was neither the soldier nor the comedian, he says, but something altogether odd and decrepit. "He wasn't energetic like he used to be. He wasn't cutting jokes. Chuck's one of those guys that talks with his hands. You go into a room with twenty guys, and you're going to hear Chuck Luther," says Byington. "Now he seemed half-asleep. He looked worn out."

A few hours after Byington's visit, Luther was called to his commander's office. Major Wehri was frank. He held the personality disorder discharge papers in his hand. "And he said,

Joshua Kors (JoshuaKors.com), winner of the Polk and National Magazine awards, covers veterans' issues for The Nation. Research support for this article was provided by the Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute.

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‘Sign this paperwork, and we’ll get you out.’ I said, ‘I don’t have a personality disorder.’ But it was like that didn’t matter,” says Luther. “He said, ‘If you don’t sign this, you’re going to be here a lot longer.’”

The sergeant signed. “They had me broke down,” he says. “At that point, I just wanted to get home.” Luther’s voice grows quiet as he recounts that final meeting. “I still remember Wehri’s face,” he says. “He was smiling.”

Wehri confirms his statements to Luther. He says he pressed the sergeant to sign because he felt it was in Luther’s best interest and in the best interest of the Army. The sergeant, he says, “had gotten so belligerent. If we had returned him to his unit, he would have been a danger to himself and to others. His behavior was not suitable to military service. And he wanted to get home. So I told him, ‘If your goal is to get home, and we’ve diagnosed you with personality disorder, your fastest way is to sign the papers. If you don’t sign, you’re just subjecting yourself to further anguish and discomfort.’”

‘All I wanted was to be treated for my injuries. Now suddenly I’m not a soldier. I’m a prisoner, by my own people. I felt like a caged animal.’

Wehri insists that his comments to Luther were not pivotal to the sergeant’s discharge. Even without a soldier’s signature, a PD dismissal can proceed. But the papers would then move to an Army lawyer, and the process would be delayed. “You can’t force anyone to sign,” he says. “But if you’re going to be stubborn and not sign, try to play hardball, you run the risk of a dishonorable discharge. With Luther’s biting and spitting, I could have court-martialed him out right there for failure to perform in a military manner.”

The major says Luther’s real story is that of a good soldier who came home for leave, saw his wife’s new haircut and slimmed figure and was driven mad by fears of her infidelity. “When he came back to Iraq, something had changed. He had a negative attitude. He wouldn’t respond to direct orders. His head wasn’t in the game.” Wehri says it became clear to him that Luther was intent on returning home right away, a realization that left him disappointed but not shocked. “Soldiers are conniving,” he says. “They are manipulative. If they get in their minds they want to do something for personal gain, including going home, they’ll go to any lengths to get it.”

Wehri rejects the idea that the mortar attack and subsequent concussion could have triggered Luther’s woes. “That mortar attack was nothing,” he says. “Insignificant. Maybe he fell down. Sure. I’ve fallen down lots of times.” The major wonders aloud whether Luther is using that injury to justify his instability. He says if he thought the attack was significant, he would have investigated it fully and gotten the ball rolling for a Purple Heart.

The major confirms that Luther was confined to the aid

station for several weeks and that his room was minuscule. But he says those circumstances were unavoidable. “Discharging a soldier with personality disorder is a very long and drawn-out process,” he says. “And Luther was a danger to himself and others. He needed to be watched. The aid station, that’s where they had 24-7 supervision.”

Wehri says he marvels at the idea that Luther could be a poster child for false personality disorder discharges. He has seen seven personality disorder cases in his career, he says. “And Chuck Luther was by far the clearest one.” The major says that when Luther’s troubles began, the sergeant’s behavior confounded him. Then, says Wehri, he heard from a commander who said Luther’s family had spoken with him and revealed that Luther had suffered from psychiatric problems before entering the military and had been treated with medication. “Then suddenly it made sense to me,” says Wehri. “This was not new. His symptoms were just popping up now, after he’d kept a lid on them for many years. It all clicked into place.”

But Luther’s wife and his mother say that story is flatly false. Both say they never had such a conversation with an Army commander and are emphatic that the sergeant never faced any psychiatric problems before entering the military. “Hearing that makes me really angry,” says Luther’s mother, Barbara Guignard. “Chuck was an all-American boy. He never took any medication, and he never had a problem.”

How Dewees and Applewhite came to the conclusion that Luther was suffering from a pre-existing mental illness remains unclear. They declined to elaborate on their notes or discuss the diagnosis of personality disorder in general. What is clear is that neither Dewees nor Applewhite spoke with Luther’s family before determining that his problems existed before his military service. The sergeant’s wife and his mother say that had they been asked, both could have provided key information demonstrating Luther’s stability and health before the mortar attack.

Spc. Angel Sandoval says he could have helped as well. Sandoval, who was stationed at Camp Taji and served under Luther in the 1-7 Cavalry, laughs at the idea that the sergeant was mentally ill. “Chuck was a lot more than ‘not mentally ill,’” he says. “He saved my life.” Sandoval describes heading into combat under Luther’s command. The specialist was ready to dump his side-SAPIs, large ceramic plates that strap to the side of a bulletproof vest, protecting the kidneys from machine-gun fire. “They’re bulky and kinda heavy, but he said, ‘No way, you have to wear them,’” says Sandoval. “Two days later I got shot right there, under my arm. It could have killed me.”

Luther, he says, was “one of the greatest leaders I had. He never steered me wrong. If they thought he was ill and needed medical help, they should have given it to him instead of kicking him out of the Army.”

But it was Wehri and Applewhite’s view that mattered. Soon after signing the personality disorder papers, Luther was placed in a DC-10 and whisked back to Fort Hood. There he would learn about Chapter 5-13’s fine print: he was ineligible for disability benefits, since his condition was pre-existing. He would not be receiving the lifetime of medical care given to severely

wounded soldiers. And because he did not complete his contract, he would have to return a slice of his signing bonus.

At the base, a Fort Hood discharge specialist laid out the details. "He said I now owed the Army \$1,500. And if I did not pay, they'd garnish my wages and assess interest on my debt," Luther says.

Luther was then released into a pelting Texas rain. He called his wife, Nicki, to pick him up. "When I got to Fort Hood he was in the parking lot, alone, wet, sitting on his duffel bag," Nicki recalls. "He had lost a lot of weight. He looked like...a little boy. I remember thinking, My God, what have they done to my husband?"

The President 'Continues to Be Concerned'

Luther's case is not an isolated incident. In the past three years, *The Nation* has uncovered more than two dozen cases like his from bases across the country. All the soldiers were examined, deemed physically and psychologically fit, then welcomed into the military. All performed honorably before being wounded during service. None had a documented history of psychological problems. Yet after seeking treatment for their wounds, each soldier was diagnosed with a pre-existing personality disorder, then discharged and denied benefits.

That group includes Sgt. Jose Rivera, whose hands and legs were punctured by grenade shrapnel during his second tour in Iraq. Army doctors said his wounds were caused by personality disorder. Sailor Samantha Stitz fractured her pelvis and two bones in her ankle. Navy doctors cited personality disorder as the cause. Spc. Bonnie Moore developed an inflamed uterus during her service. Army doctors said her profuse vaginal bleeding was caused by personality disorder. Civilian doctors disagreed: they performed emergency surgery to remove her uterus and appendix. After being discharged and denied benefits, Moore and her teenage daughter became homeless.

"The military is exacerbating an already bad situation," says Sullivan of Veterans for Common Sense. "This is more than neglect. It's malice." Sullivan's organization has spent the past few years pressing officials in Washington to take action on the personality disorder issue. In July 2007 he testified before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Sullivan told the committee that PD discharges needed to be halted immediately.

That month Obama put forward his bill to do just that. The bill was matched in the House by legislation from Representative Phil Hare, and it had passionate support on both sides of the aisle, from prominent Democrats like Senator Barbara Boxer to high-ranking Republicans like Senator Kit Bond. Sullivan and other veterans' leaders say they were hopeful that Obama would use the spotlight of the presidential campaign to generate further momentum for his bill.

That didn't happen. In the twenty-one months of his presidential run, the Illinois senator never spoke publicly about PD discharges or his bill to halt them. Eventually, without widespread public knowledge or support, and facing opposition from senators who had never heard of personality disorder and worried the bill would open a floodgate of expensive benefits, Obama and Bond, the bill's co-author, were forced to reshape

it into an amendment and water down its contents. Their amendment did not halt PD discharges. Instead, it required the Pentagon to investigate PD dismissals and report back to Congress. The amendment, part of the Defense Authorization Act, was signed by President Bush in January 2008.

Five months later the report landed on Obama's and Bond's desks. The Pentagon's conclusion: no soldiers had been improperly diagnosed, and none had been wrongly discharged. The report praises the military's doctors as "competent professionals" and endorses continued use of pre-existing personality disorder to discharge soldiers whose "ability to function effectively" is impaired. The report's author, former Under Secretary of Defense David Chu, further notes that though the Navy's official label for the discharge is "Separation by Reason of Convenience of the Government," soldiers "are not wantonly discharged at the convenience of the Military."

It is unclear how Chu came to these conclusions. The report does not cite any interviews with soldiers discharged with personality disorder, or their families, doctors or commanders. That fact infuriated many military families, as it triggered memories of a 2007 study by former Army Surgeon General Gale Pollock. Pollock had been asked to examine a stack of PD cases. Five months later she released her report, saying her office had "thoughtfully and thoroughly" reviewed them. Like Chu, she commended the soldiers' doctors and determined that they all had been properly diagnosed. *The Nation* later revealed that Pollock's office did not interview anyone, not even the soldiers whose cases she was reviewing [see Kors, "Specialist Town Takes His Case to Washington," October 15, 2007].

"He doesn't talk to soldiers, and he doesn't talk to their families?" says Nicki Luther, the sergeant's wife, her eyes welling with tears. "I heard the same thing from that surgeon general, and I thought, You haven't been in my house. You don't know what I've dealt with. How dare you sit there and say you've investigated thoroughly and found nothing. That's a crock."

The Chu report does recommend several changes to the PD discharge system, alterations, it says, that will protect soldiers from being wrongly discharged. Those protections include requiring that a doctor diagnose the soldier's personality disorder and a lawyer counsel him on the ramifications of the discharge. The report also recommends that the surgeon general review each soldier's case and endorse the PD discharge before releasing the soldier from the military.

Chu, a Bush appointee, left office in 2008 with the president. But his findings remain as the Defense Department's position on PD discharges. In early April the Pentagon released a statement saying that Clifford Stanley, the current under secretary, is implementing Chu's recommendations and fully embraces his findings.

That fact left many on Capitol Hill enraged. "This study, with the new requirement to have the upper-ups approve discharges—all it basically did was set up one more hurdle. As far as we can tell, the impact has been somewhere between zero and less," says Senator Bond. Bond says the Pentagon still hasn't explained the fundamental contradiction of a PD discharge: recruits who have a severe pre-existing mental illness could not pass the rigorous screening process and would

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not be accepted into the military in the first place. Yet he says his office is looking at several cases, like Luther's, in which the soldiers have been deemed physically and psychologically fit in several screenings before their personality disorder is diagnosed. "These men and women who have put their lives on the line, we owe them," says Bond. "We have a responsibility. Discharging them with personality disorder—it's just an easy way to duck that responsibility."

The Republican from Missouri says he's hopeful that Obama, his partner on the PD bill, will take action from the White House. "He has a unique chance now to change the whole operation, to alter the system from the inside." In October Bond gathered a small coalition of senators and wrote a letter to the president, asking him to confront the issue once again. "In 2007 we were partners in the fight against the military's misuse of personality disorder discharges," wrote the senators. "Today, we urge you to renew your commitment to address this critical issue."

The next week Senator Boxer, a co-sponsor of the original bill, submitted a statement of her own. "It is simply appalling that any combat veteran with a Traumatic Brain Injury [TBI] or Posttraumatic Stress Disorder would be denied medical care for injuries sustained during combat," Boxer wrote. Even with the reforms that followed the Chu report, "we must make sure that the new discharge process...is working."

The White House responded quickly, assuring the senators that the president still has his eye on personality disorder. President Obama "is determined to fulfill America's responsibility to our Armed Forces," says White House spokesman Nicholas Shapiro. "The president was concerned with personality disorder discharges as a senator, and he drafted a bill. He continues to be concerned as commander in chief."

Disposable Warriors

Luther hopes that concern will translate into action. The sergeant stands in his backyard, 1,500 miles from Washington, five miles from Fort Hood, talking about Obama's bill and watching his 7-year-old daughter floating high above the family's oversize trampoline, her face wild with joy. Luther looks on with sullen eyes. "Right now I can't worry about Washington, or even about fixing my discharge papers," he says. "First thing, I got to fix myself." He gestures to his daughter, a mop of blond hair leaping to and fro. "I used to be like that: a goofball, all this energy. Now... I don't know."

Some nights he doesn't sleep. Others he's back in Iraq, in the aid station, in endless isolation. The blinding headaches and piercing shoulder pain still plague him, he says, along with panic attacks and bursts of post-traumatic stress-fueled rage. Luther broke four bones in his hand punching a hole in his bedroom wall. His family's hallway is pocked with holes from similar incidents.

"He's not the man I married," says Nicki Luther. "And when I'm honest with myself, I don't think I'll ever have that man again. He wakes up screaming in the middle of the night, sweating, swearing." Nicki says he tries to be a good dad to their kids. "He used to wrestle around with them. But his body's like an old

man's now. And he's so quick to anger. The kids say, 'We want our dad back.' I don't know what to tell them."

Three years after the mortar blast, Luther's life is still on shaky ground. Some days he's posting love notes on his wife's Facebook page and hand-delivering her favorite salad to her office at lunchtime. Another day, in the midst of an argument, he knocked down a family photo, then ripped the furniture out of the living room and dumped it in the garage, scaring his children. Soon after the birth of their fourth child, Marlee Grace, Luther and his wife separated. They reunited a few months later, in time for their eighteenth anniversary.

Luther knew he needed help. This time he sought it outside the military. He began seeing Troy Daniels, a psychologist, once a week. One fact was clear immediately, says Daniels. "He did not have personality disorder. The symptoms we were looking at looked more like traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder. To take a soldier having problems with vision, hearing and so forth—and to say he has personality disorder—that's a bogus kind of statement. I don't even think a master's student would make that kind of mistake."

While Daniels dismisses the Army doctors' diagnosis as a "gross error," he says he was not surprised by it. "I've treated hundreds of soldiers over the years, and I've seen a dozen personality disorder diagnoses. None of them," says the psychologist, "actually had personality disorder."

Yet all of those soldiers, he says, faced serious repercussions because of their discharge. "Many of the soldiers can't get hired anymore. Every time they go for a job, they'll have this paper that says they've been diagnosed with a personality disorder. Employers take one look at that and think, 'This guy's crazy. We can't hire him.' For most of the soldiers," says Daniels, "it becomes a lifetime label."

Luther luckily has secured a job, as a truck driver for Frito-Lay. Securing benefits has proved a bit tougher. Since being released from the Army, the sergeant has been locked in battle with the VA, fighting to prove that despite his PD discharge, his wounds are war related and thus worthy of disability and medical benefits.

Those efforts stumbled at first. In May 2008 the VA declared Luther "incompetent" and demanded that a fiduciary collect any disability benefits he may receive. Eventually, following a slew of paperwork and medical exams, the sergeant re-established his full standing. This past December—after VA doctors found Luther to be suffering from migraine headaches, vision problems, dizziness, nausea, difficulty hearing, numbness, anxiety and irritability—the VA cited traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder and declared Luther 80 percent disabled. "PTSD, a consequence of the TBI," wrote one VA doctor, "is a clear diagnosis."

The VA rating cleared the way for the sergeant to receive disability benefits and a lifetime of medical care. But it hasn't changed the Army's view—or altered Luther's discharge papers, which still list the sergeant as suffering from personality disorder. The sergeant, in return, has refused to pay back the \$1,500 of his signing bonus that the Army says he owes, despite threats to garnish his wages. "I told them, Let me put it this way: as long as I'm breathing of my own free

will, I'm not paying you a dime."

Luther says what really boils his blood is having to accept that his military career is over while the careers of those who devised his discharge are flourishing. After Luther's dismissal, Wehri, a captain at the time, was promoted to major and selected to be an executive officer with NATO. Dr. Dewees returned to Kentucky, where he continues to serve with the National Guard. Social worker Applewhite is now an instructor at Fort Sam Houston, where he teaches a class on how to identify mental disorders.

With or without the Army, Luther says he will continue to serve. With his health gradually improving and the bulk of his battle over, the sergeant is taking on a new mission: fighting the military on behalf of other soldiers like himself. Luther is

now the founder and executive director of Disposable Warriors, a one-man operation that assists soldiers who are fighting their discharge and veterans who are appealing their disability rating.

Luther's organization did not receive a hero's welcome. Soon after founding the group, he discovered a threatening note on his windshield. "Back off or you and your family will pay!!" it read, in careful, black ink cursive. Weeks later, thieves broke into the home of a veterans' organizer who worked closely with Luther, taking nothing but the files of the soldiers they were assisting.

The sergeant, characteristically, is undaunted. "This is the right path for me," he says, his voice resolute. "I got to be there for these other soldiers. I'm not the only one who needs help." ■

Going Postal in the Digital Era

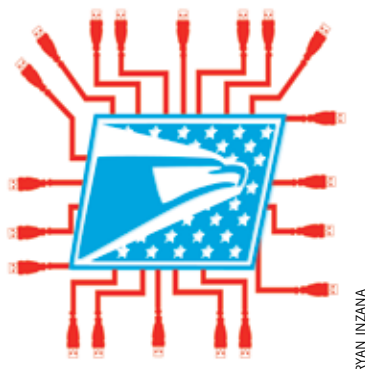
An essential instrument of democracy, the Postal Service should be reimagined—not shrunk.

by JOHN NICHOLS

Domestic policy debates of late have degenerated into an absurd argument about whether government can do anything right. Even Democrats can be heard mouthing the false premise that private markets are always the answer to the nation's public problems. But government does do things right; indeed, it does something right every day on a massive scale. The oldest of America's major public services—established by decree of the Continental Congress, brought into being by Benjamin Franklin and enumerated in the first article of the Constitution as a vital tool for binding together the new Republic—carries on in the twenty-first century as an essential and possibly transformative arm of the federal government, a service that has only begun to tap this agency's potential.

This is the proper starting point for progressives to enter the great debate about the future of the US Postal Service—and enter they must if there is to be any hope for maintaining it at a time when public services are under overwhelming political and economic assault. Because of declining mail volume and Congressional reforms that transformed the Postal Service from a taxpayer-supported institution into a "revenue neutral" agency that is expected to pay for itself, the Postal Service recorded a \$3.8 billion loss in 2009 and is, according to an extreme but oft-quoted estimate, on track to accumulate a \$238 billion deficit by 2020. The service has also been harmed by poor political and managerial choices—not to mention accounting errors that have socked it with pension liabilities that are as unsustainable as they are unreasonable.

The Postal Service's economic turbulence has fostered the fantasy that it is no longer necessary in an age when "warp-speed



RYAN INZANA

Internet" is constantly juxtaposed against "snail mail." Yet the USPS is anything but "an anachronism" on "a slow march into oblivion." It is a national treasure that provides an immense and irreplaceable public service. The scope and character of that service will change in the twenty-first century—ideally to provide a broader range of information, vote-by-mail systems, community services and even banking options to hundreds of millions of Americans who continue to rely on their local post office as the nerve center of their neighborhood or small town. But before

any of this can happen, we must recognize that the Postal Service can and must remain public if we are to maintain the essential infrastructures of democracy.

Americans do not often talk about the Postal Service as a crucial underpinning of the democratic infrastructure, but we should. At a time when 35 percent of all Americans and 50 percent of rural residents have no broadband Internet access at home, the Postal Service is universal. Its 596,000 career employees travel more than 4 million miles to deliver more than a half-billion pieces of mail each day. It goes to extraordinary ends to assure that no citizen or community is neglected; it contracts commercial planes to move parcels across the country in a matter of hours, yet it still sends bush planes into Idaho's River of No Return Wilderness Area and organizes mule trains to deliver mail, food and supplies to the Havasupai Indians on the floor of the Grand Canyon.

The Postal Service maintains a network of more than 35,000 retail outlets—the largest in the world, with more locations than McDonald's, Starbucks and Wal-Mart combined—which are visited by more than 7 million Americans each day. The postal workers they encounter in these offices and on their doorsteps

are reflective of their communities, as the service has historically been and remains one of the surest sources of employment for African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latinos, women and the poor. In short, the USPS forms a vital network of service, connection and community that provides the steadiest link between Americans and their government. As Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) chair Ruth Goldway puts it, the service is “part of the fabric of the nation.”

Unfortunately, the Postal Service is not profitable. That’s a problem because, under the absurd constraints placed on it by successive legislative “reforms,” the service must be “run like a business.” And the businesspeople who run the USPS these days, though they may want to save the service, are so fixated on the bottom line that they cannot see the public good. So they have proposed a process of downsizing that could lead to the dismemberment of what should be understood as a core civic institution.

If the wrecking crews are not stopped, they will tear a hole in the fabric of the nation, further isolating Americans from one another, deepening the decay of urban neighborhoods and remote villages, hiking unemployment in our hardest-pressed communities and accelerating the decline of newspapers and magazines, drying up content for the Internet and curtailing civic and political discourse. “We need the Postal Service,” says Illinois Congressman Danny Davis, a member of the House subcommittee that oversees the nation’s post offices. Of course the Postal Service is going to change, Davis acknowledges. But Americans should start with the understanding that the Postal Service is “indispensable”—not with a debate about how much will be cut.

Regrettably, the latter approach is the one being taken by Postmaster General John Potter and members of the Postal Board of Governors, who are floating proposals to eliminate six-day mail delivery, close thousands of post offices and cut 26,000 full-time and 13,000 part-time jobs through attrition and layoffs. Overreacting to changes in the way Americans communicate while underestimating ideas that could reposition post offices as touchstones for the information revolution and a more consumer-friendly financial-services landscape, Potter and his compatriots imagine that the only response to a rough stretch is to slash the USPS. The madness of the cuts is summed up by Senator Susan Collins, a Maine Republican, who says, “The Postal Service cannot expect to gain more business, which it desperately needs, if it is reducing service.”

Even the service’s most determined defenders say that if the restructuring proposed by Potter goes through, the end result will not be the “leaner, more market responsive Postal Service” the postmaster general imagines. Rather, as American Postal Workers Union president William Burrus says, “It would be the beginning of the demise of the Postal Service.”

But, of course, Americans will still need to communicate using paper and printed materials, and they will still need to ship all those parcels ordered over the Internet. The Postal Service’s demise would not mean the end of those enterprises,

just the end of postal workers’ jobs and the service’s commitment to communities that might not be the priorities of private companies like FedEx. Indeed, the downsizing of the Postal Service has often been discussed as the first step toward a huge bartering off of its responsibilities. Burrus has been saying for years that the service “has begun to travel resolutely down the road of privatization.” And the *Washington Post* is editorializing, “Given the state of technology, privatization is probably the only long-term solution for the USPS.”

Thankfully, privatization has a powerful critic. In response to a question posed in February about selling the Postal Service to the highest bidder, President Obama said that privatization is a “bad idea most of the time” because “oftentimes what you see is companies want to buy those parts of a government-run op that are profitable, and they don’t want to do anything else. So, for example, the US Postal Service; everybody would love to have that high-end part of the business that FedEx and UPS are already in—business to business, you make a lot of money. But do they want to deliver that postcard to a remote area somewhere in rural America that is a money loser? Well, the US

The Postal Service’s 35,000 outlets—more than McDonald’s, Starbucks and Wal-Mart combined—serve 7 million each day.

post office provides universal service. Those companies would not want to provide universal service.”

Like many members of Congress, the president has sent signals suggesting a discomfort with cutting mail delivery down to five days. But he’s been less engaged with the equally serious threat posed by proposals to increase stamp prices and rates for weekly newspapers and magazines, two moves that threaten to drive more paying customers away from a service that has seen annual mail deliveries drop from 208 billion pieces in 2000 to 177 billion pieces last year.

That drop in mail volume is often blamed for the Postal Service’s fiscal troubles, but as economist Dean Baker notes, the service “has been scaling back its workforce more than proportionately to the decline in mail volume, increasing the productivity of its workforce. This is exactly how we would expect a private business to respond to the decrease in demand for its services.” According to Baker, “The cause of the [current] shortfall has been the requirement put in place by Congress in 2006 that the Postal Service pre-fund 80 percent (up from 50 percent at present) of retiree healthcare benefits. The rule required that they reach this funding level in ten years. The Postal Service spent \$12.4 billion to reach this pre-funding target over the last three years, an amount considerably larger than its \$11.7 billion shortfall over this period.”

In addition, argues USPS inspector general David Williams, the service was overcharged \$75 billion by the government for pension liabilities when the Office of Personnel Management miscalculated its obligations. And, notes Baker, the Postal Service was “prevented by the Bush administration from apply-

ing for the employer subsidies available under Medicare Part D to businesses that provide drug coverage to retired workers.” What it all adds up to, according to Williams, is a pattern of “inequitable...financial entanglements between the Postal Service and the federal government” that are “generally at the expense of the Postal Service.”

With encouragement from the postmaster general, the House has taken steps to address some of these concerns, and Baker suggests that Congress should order an independent assessment of the key accounting issues. These moves, if approved by the Senate and the White House, would considerably ease the service’s economic uncertainty. That does not mean, however, that postal unions and defenders of the public interest should breathe a sigh of relief. Rather, the current focus on the circumstances and prospects of the agency creates an opening for a radical rethink of those “entanglements.”

Today the Postal Service exists in a netherworld where it must provide universal service—a classic public good—and at the same time break even; it must “compete” with private parcel services while providing them with platforms to expand their nonunionized and nonuniversal businesses; it must meet the demands of Congress while getting by without tax dollars.

Instead of entertaining ill-thought-out discussions about

Thousands of communities that don’t have libraries have post offices—shouldn’t each one have a hot spot with high-speed broadband?

how to squeeze the Postal Service even more than it has already been squeezed, Congress needs a precise picture of what is threatened when we talk of going to five-day delivery, shuttering post offices, laying off experienced postal workers, hiking rates for newspapers and magazines (including, it should be noted, publications such as *The Nation*) and privatizing pieces of what is supposed to be a ubiquitous public service.

These “efficiencies” threaten more than just the Postal Service. They pose direct and indirect threats to democracy. Oregon Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley noted as much when they asked Congress and the USPS to avoid taking steps that would damage their state’s mail-in balloting. “While we admire and encourage examination of avenues to modernize the postal service, the implementation of this proposal would pose a direct threat to democracy in Oregon,” wrote the senators, whose concerns have been echoed by election officials from around the country, which increasingly relies on the Postal Service to carry regular and absentee ballots.

The PRC’s Goldway has been at the forefront of arguments for taking state-based “Vote by Mail” experiments national. “Voters would not need to take time off from work, find transportation, find the right polling station, get babysitters or rush through reading complicated ballot initiatives,” she explains. “The country’s 35,000 post offices could provide information,

distribute and collect voting materials and issue inexpensive residency and address identifications for voting purposes. Perhaps most important, given the concerns about voting machine security, mail ballots cannot be hacked. Tampering or interfering with mail is a federal crime, and the United States Postal Service has its own law enforcement arm, which works closely with a variety of enforcement authorities including the F.B.I. Trained election clerks can take the time to check signatures without delaying or discouraging voters. And the advantages of a paper trail outshine the glitter of black box electronic gadgetry.”

That’s one of many visions for giving the Postal Service new and necessary responsibilities that are in sync with its historic mission. Another would be to dramatically reduce the rates charged the weekly newspapers and journals of opinion that sustain our civic and democratic discourse in their traditional print form and online. A new *Columbia Journalism Review* survey of more than 600 websites of print magazines suggests that magazines that do not make a profit on the web are nonetheless providing immense amounts of web content. Roughly half the magazines surveyed provide all significant content from their print editions free on the web, although many of their websites are losing money. In other words, print publications are subsidizing the web even as they struggle to survive in an age of declining circulation rates and dipping advertising revenues.

CJR presented its survey as “the beginning of a long-overdue conversation” about the relationship of magazines to the web. That conversation, the editors suggest, should focus on the role print publications and their websites play in the “flow of information on which our democratic society is predicated.” Before postal rates are raised for journals of opinion and other content-rich print publications, researchers should determine the extent

to which these publications are powering serious discourse in the digital age. Logic suggests this research will conclude that reducing postal rates for small magazines and newspapers will strengthen the scope and quality of the debate, not only in print but online. This is a public service investment that would seem to make particular sense when everyone is worried about how we’re going to sustain journalism during the difficult transition to the digital age; and, again, it is entirely in keeping with the mission of the Postal Service, which at its founding fostered the development of robust newspapers and journals of opinion with massive postal subsidies.

In the transition to a digital future, the Postal Service is neither at odds with nor resistant to new technologies. Indeed, just as the service was the driving force behind the expansion of a younger nation’s roads, railways and air transportation systems, it is now at the forefront of developing and implementing digital advances. The Postal Service maintains the world’s third-largest computing infrastructure—including more than 5,000 remote locations that receive Internet service via satellite. It operates the world’s largest intranet system and is the world’s leader in optical character recognition technology. Its ZIP code system serves as the structural underpinning for the nation’s 911 emergency system.

Now the Postal Service should begin to consider the poten-

tial its network of physical facilities has to play in closing the digital divide. Thousands of neighborhoods and rural communities that do not have libraries or other easily accessible public facilities have post offices; shouldn't every post office have a hot spot with high-speed broadband? And shouldn't the Postal Service be reimagining itself, in the way that highly innovative postal services in other countries have, as a media and technology innovator and service provider—think digital mail, to start with. “We believe we are in the communication business, not just in the physical letter-mail business,” explained Swiss Post executive vice president Frank Marthaler, in a recent interview with the magazine *Monocle*, which portrayed Marthaler and his colleagues as occupying “unique turf at the intersection of data networks and the old-fashioned letter routes, with the ability to carve out an unrivalled position in the digital age.”

When the conversation about the Postal Service's future is turned on its head, it becomes evident that this public utility does not need to be ever on the defensive. It could remain a government-owned entity with a core public-service mission and the flexibility to achieve that mission, as has Swiss Post, which was radically restructured in order to adjust to the new communications landscape. Indeed, the post office is precisely where the federal government should be making smart infrastructure and job-creation investments, as part of a new approach that seeks to maintain a public asset and maximize its potential.

Such an approach might even renew one of the greatest of all postal services. From 1910 to 1967, the agency maintained a postal banking system that allowed citizens to open small savings accounts at local post offices. The system was so successful

that after World War II, it had a balance of \$3 billion—roughly \$30 billion in today's dollars. Congress did away with postal banking in the late 1960s, but other countries—notably Japan—have maintained such systems. Today, Japan Post is, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, “the world's largest financial institution by assets, with \$3.3 trillion on its balance sheet.”

In the midst of the 2008 financial panic, Michael Lind, policy director of the Economic Growth Program of the New America Foundation, proposed that “a new postal savings system should be part of America's post-meltdown financial architecture.” “When Congress created the postal savings system nearly a century ago, one of its goals was to encourage savings among the large number of low-income immigrants,” Lind wrote. “A new system would help today's immigrants as well as the native poor. Banks are not interested in people with so little money, many of whom are preyed upon by payday lenders and credit card companies.” The National League of Postmasters has started talking up the idea, and even Postmaster General Potter has hinted at openness to what Lind describes as a “simple” notion: “use the one government institution that can be found in most neighborhoods and rural areas—the post office—to encourage small savings and a habit of thrift.” From that simple idea could, he suggests, come financial security for millions of Americans, an alternative to growing indebtedness of the country to foreign governments and financial institutions, and a vehicle to fund investment in public assets like sewer systems and bridges.

That's quite a payback for believing in the promise of the Postal Service. But, just as it did in Ben Franklin's day, the post office can still deliver for America in the twenty-first century. ■

‘Two, Three, Many Afghanistans’

Obama's Pentagon is preparing for a number of counterinsurgencies in the developing world.

by MICHAEL T. KLARE

With little fanfare, the Defense Department has announced a revolution in military strategy—a transformation in global outlook and combat tactics whose only true precedent is the equally momentous turnaround engineered by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara during the Kennedy administration. Then, as now, an incoming administration inherited a strategy heavily weighted toward high-intensity warfare among well-equipped adversaries, mostly in Europe and Asia; now, as then, the response has been to redirect the Pentagon's attention toward low-intensity combat on the fringes of the developing world.



RYAN INZANA

The result back then was Vietnam; today it is Afghanistan and an unknown number of “future Afghanistans.”

When Kennedy assumed the presidency in 1961, the Defense Department was governed by a military “posture” that emphasized nuclear war and massive tank battles on the plains of Europe. Sensing that the main theater of competition between the superpowers had shifted to proxy warfare in Asia, Africa and Latin America, Kennedy ordered McNamara to undertake a massive enhancement of US capabilities for what were then called “brush-fire wars” in the Third World. The president also authorized a vast expansion of the Special Forces—then a small and obscure Army unit intended for partisan operations behind Soviet lines in Eastern Europe—and gave them responsibility for promoting the newly fashionable concept of counterinsurgency.

“Subversive insurgency is another type of war, new in its

Michael T. Klare, The Nation's defense correspondent, is professor of peace and world security studies at Hampshire College. His latest book is Rising Powers, Shrinking Planet: The New Geopolitics of Energy.

intensity, ancient in its origins—war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins; war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration instead of aggression,” Kennedy said at West Point in 1962. “It requires in those situations where we must counter it...a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force, and therefore a new and wholly different kind of training.”

Kennedy’s fierce patronage of counterinsurgency doctrine led to expanded US involvement in Southeast Asia and ultimately to the unmitigated disaster of Vietnam. In the wake of the war there, the US military largely abandoned its interest in counterinsurgency, fearing the specter of Che Guevara’s 1967 call for “two, three, many Vietnams.” Instead, it chose to focus on a renewed cold war in Europe and later, under the first President Bush, conventional combat against “rogue” states like Iran, Iraq and North Korea—basically recycling tactics developed for combat against Soviet forces. Although promising to modernize this posture after 9/11, the second President Bush merely grafted his “global war on terror” onto the rogue-state approach, choosing to invade Iraq rather than invent a new strategy aimed at radical Islamist insurgencies.

Despite the worrisome picture in Afghanistan, the Pentagon is determined to export this model to other areas, many for the first time.

Now we have President Obama and his domineering Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, both of whom have criticized the Pentagon’s emphasis on conventional combat at the expense of low-intensity warfare. Iraq, Obama has said, was the “wrong” war, a distraction from the more urgent task of defeating Al Qaeda and its network of allies, including the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban. To rectify this strategic bungling, as he sees it, Obama has been redeploying combat resources from Iraq to Afghanistan. But this is just the beginning of his grand vision: Obama seeks to fashion a new military posture that shifts the emphasis from conventional combat to brush-fire wars and counterinsurgency.

“The struggle against violent extremism will not be finished quickly, and it extends well beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan,” Obama declared at West Point on December 1. “Unlike the great power conflicts and clear lines of division that defined the twentieth century, our effort will involve disorderly regions, failed states, diffuse enemies.” To prevail in these contests, “we’ll have to be nimble and precise in our use of military power. Where Al Qaeda and its allies attempt to establish a foothold—whether in Somalia or Yemen or elsewhere—they must be confronted by growing pressure and strong partnerships.”

Clearly, this is a long-term strategy with far-reaching implications. Even if Obama brings some forces back from Afghanistan in the summer of 2011, as he has pledged, US troops are likely to be engaged there (some perhaps in a covert mode) and in a number of other hot spots—“two, three, many Afghanistans,” to put Che’s dictum into contemporary parlance.

This strategy, first enunciated in a series of speeches by

Obama and Gates, has been given formal character in the Quadrennial Defense Review, the Pentagon’s Congressionally mandated overhaul of strategy. Released on February 1, the QDR is expected to guide military planning over the next four years and to govern the Pentagon’s budget priorities.

Like earlier Pentagon reviews, the 2010 QDR begins by reaffirming America’s stature as a global power with global responsibilities—a burden no other country can shoulder. “The strength and influence of the United States are deeply intertwined with the fate of the broader international system,” the document asserts. “The U.S. military must therefore be prepared to support broad national goals of promoting stability in key regions, providing assistance to nations in need, and promoting the common good.”

But while this globalist mission has remained unchanged for many decades, the nature of the threats confronted by American forces has changed dramatically. “The United States faces a complex and uncertain security landscape in which the pace of change continues to accelerate,” the QDR indicates. “The rise of new powers, the growing influence of non-state actors, the spread of weapons of mass destruction and other destructive enabling technologies... pose profound challenges to international order.”

The United States also faces a danger not unlike that envisioned by Kennedy in 1961: the emergence of radical insurgencies in the corrupt and decaying nations of the developing world. “The changing international system will continue to put pressure on the modern state system, likely increasing the frequency and severity of the challenges associated with chronically fragile states,” the QDR notes. “These states are often catalysts for the growth of radicalism and extremism.”

In this environment, America’s traditional advantages in conventional conflict—what the QDR calls “large-scale force-on-force warfare”—can no longer guarantee success. Instead, the US military must be prepared to prevail in any number of conceivable combat scenarios and employ the same sort of novel warfighting tactics as those used by America’s rivals and adversaries. Our principal objective, the QDR affirms, is “ensuring that US forces are flexible and adaptable so that they can confront the full range of challenges that could emerge from a complex and dynamic security environment.”

Within this mandate, no priority is given greater weight than the task of preparing for an unending series of counterinsurgency campaigns in remote corners of the developing world. “The wars we are fighting today and assessments of the future security environment together demand that the United States retain and enhance a whole-of-government capability to succeed in large-scale counterinsurgency (COIN), stability, and counterterrorism (CT) operations in environments ranging from densely populated urban areas and mega-cities, to remote mountains, deserts, jungles, and littoral regions,” the QDR explains.

The language used here is instructive—both in the degree to which it reveals current Pentagon thinking and the ways it echoes Kennedy’s outlook. “Stability operations, large-scale counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism operations are not

niche challenges or the responsibility of a single Military Department, but rather require a portfolio of capabilities as well as sufficient capacity from across America's Armed Forces," the QDR states. "Nor are these type of operations a transitory or anomalous phenomenon in the security landscape. On the contrary, we must expect that for the indefinite future, violent extremist groups, with or without state sponsorship, will continue to foment instability and challenge U.S. and allied interests." As a result, "U.S. forces will need to maintain a high level of competency in this mission area *for decades to come.*" (Emphasis added.)

As the QDR makes plain, this will require substantial retooling of military capabilities. In place of "large-scale force-on-force warfare," the Pentagon must be configured to fight many small-scale conflicts in dissimilar locations on several continents at once. This requires that forces be equipped for counterinsurgency-type operations: helicopters, small arms, body armor, night-vision devices, mine-resistant vehicles, aerial gunships, surveillance drones and the like. Some of this material has already been provided to forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the entire military will have to be re-equipped.

Also required will be increased military aid and training (provided by growing cadres of Special Forces) for the military and police forces of embattled governments in fraying Third World states.

"Terrorist groups seek to evade security forces by exploiting ungoverned and under-governed areas as safe havens from which to recruit, indoctrinate, and train fighters," the QDR notes. "Where appropriate, U.S. forces will work with the military forces of partner nations to strengthen their capacity for internal security.... For reasons of political legitimacy as well as sheer economic necessity, there is no substitute for professional, motivated local security forces protecting populations threatened by insurgents and terrorists in their midst."

Except for a slight modernization of terminology, these are exactly the words used by Kennedy to justify the deployment of thousands of counterinsurgency "advisers" in Vietnam, plus hundreds more in Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The danger is that America's "partner nations" are not capable of deploying "professional, motivated" forces, so US soldiers will be compelled to shoulder an ever-increasing share of the burden. As proved true in Vietnam—and as is being repeated today in Afghanistan—this will likely be the case when the local army and police are viewed by the majority of the population as tools of a corrupt and unresponsive government.

What should be cause for alarm is that despite the worrisome picture in Afghanistan, the Pentagon is determined to export this model to other areas, many for the first time, including Africa. "The need to assist fragile, post-conflict states, such as Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sudan, and failed states such as Somalia, and transnational problems, including extremism, piracy, illegal fishing, and narcotics trafficking, pose significant challenges," the document notes. "America's efforts will hinge on partnering with African

states, other international allies and partners, and regional and sub-regional security organizations to conduct capacity-building and peacekeeping operations, prevent terrorism, and address humanitarian crises."

The United States is already assisting the Ugandan government in its seemingly futile efforts to eradicate the Lord's Resistance Army, a brutal guerrilla group with no discernible ideology, as well as the Somali government in its (equally futile) campaign to rid Mogadishu of Al Shabab, a militant Islamic group linked to Al Qaeda. It is likely that advisory teams from the Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa, based at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, are engaged in similar operations in North Africa and the Sahel. (The CJTF–HOA is the combat arm of the US Africa Command, a multiservice headquarters organization established by Bush in 2008 and given expanded responsibilities since then by Obama.)

The Pentagon is also supporting counterinsurgency operations in Colombia, the Philippines and Yemen, among other countries. Typically, these operations entail deploying training and advisory teams, providing arms and intelligence informa-

Plans to harness 'intellectual capital' recall the infamous Vietnam-era Army effort to secure academic assistance for counterinsurgency.

tion, and employing (often covert) specialized combat units. According to the QDR, "U.S. forces are working in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, Colombia, and elsewhere to provide training, equipment, and advice to their host-country counterparts on how to better seek out and dismantle terrorist and insurgent networks while providing security to populations that have been intimidated by violent elements in their midst." Again, one must ask, Just how deeply is the United States involved? Where is this leading? What happens when the "host-country counterparts" prove unequal to the task?

The worry that this will lead to an endless series of Vietnam- or Afghanistan-like counterinsurgencies is further heightened by the QDR's call for increased reliance on social scientists to better comprehend the perplexing social and cultural realities of these faraway places. Under its Minerva Initiative, the Defense Department is seeking "the intellectual capital necessary to meet the challenges of operating in a changing and complex environment." For those whose memory stretches back far enough, this will recall the infamous Project Camelot, a Vietnam-era Army effort to secure academic assistance in assessing public attitudes in Third World countries for counterinsurgency purposes.

The greatest risk in all this, of course, is that the military will become bogged down in a constellation of grueling, low-level wars. This is the prospect of "imperial over-stretch" spoken of by Yale historian Paul Kennedy in his 1987 classic, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. It is also, says Fareed Zakaria in *The Post-American World*, the scenario we must avoid if the United States is to escape the fate of the British Empire and other failed

imperiums. “Britain’s strategic blunder was to spend decades—time and money, energy and attention—on vain attempts to stabilize peripheral places on the map,” Zakaria wrote in 2008. “The United States could easily fall into a similar imperial trap.”

The Pentagon’s renewed commitment to counterinsurgency and low-intensity warfare will also require a substantial investment in new hardware at a time when the country faces a record deficit, further eroding its long-term vitality. To obtain the added funds he deems necessary, Gates has asked for an \$18 billion increase in the Pentagon’s base budget for the 2011 fiscal year, raising total spending to \$549 billion (which does not include combat costs in Iraq and Afghanistan). To gain additional financing for these projects, he has been willing to sacrifice some big-ticket items intended for major conventional wars, such as the F-22 jet fighter (discontinued in 2009).

Gates calls this shift in emphasis “rebalancing,” and it is said to be the guiding principle of the new Pentagon budget. “Rebalancing our forces in support of these strategic priorities means that US forces must be flexible and adaptable to confront the full range of plausible challenges,” Under Secretary of Defense Michèle Flournoy, one of the QDR’s principal authors, told a Pentagon press briefing on February 1. “To underwrite this flexibility...we need more and better enabling capabilities...like intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, rotary-wing aircraft, language skills and so forth.”

The danger here is that Congress—prodded by powerful

interests in the military-industrial complex—will approve the specialized counterinsurgency equipment sought by Gates and Flournoy, as well as an array of costly, super-sophisticated weapons designed to fight a full-scale war with some future, Soviet-like “peer” competitor. Under these circumstances, the Pentagon budget will continue to grow.

The Obama-Gates strategy thus entails a double peril. On the one hand, it risks involvement in an endless series of wars, wearing down the military and turning more and more non-Westerners against the United States—exactly the outcome envisioned by Che in his famous 1967 dictum. On the other hand, the “rebalancing” sought by Gates could lead to higher spending on low-intensity hardware while failing to curb investment in high-end weaponry, thereby producing ever-increasing military budgets, a growing national deficit and persistent economic paralysis. In the worst case, both outcomes will occur, dooming the United States to retreat, humiliation and penury.

There is no reason to doubt that Obama and Gates believe they are acting in the nation’s—and the world’s—best interest by advocating a strategy of global counterinsurgency. Such a strategy could conceivably prevent Al Qaeda from gaining a temporary foothold in some “ungovernable area” on the fringe of the Islamic world. But it will not eliminate the conditions that give rise to Islamist extremism, nor will it ensure lasting peace. The Pentagon’s new strategy can only lead, in the end, to a world of increased anti-Americanism and violence. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

ed in New York by the end of this year, with 500 more jobs in 2011 and a growing solar energy industry beyond that. These facts are readily available, but Pemberton never picked up the phone to learn about them.

MAURICE HINCHEY, *Congressman*
22nd District, New York

Pemberton Replies

WASHINGTON, D.C.

I am very glad to learn of Maurice Hinchey’s efforts to build a solar energy cluster in New York. This is one model for the economic transformation that needs to take place in communities across the country. I will mention this example in my future writing and speaking on this topic.

Hinchey says the new program will cost more than the canceled one. The Defense Department’s under secretary for acquisition, Ashton Carter, says the intent is that it will cost less and will be a model for the administration’s commitment to cut Pentagon waste and to reform the acquisition process, which creates cost overruns in virtually every defense program. We all need to watch what

they do and hold them to their word.

MIRIAM PEMBERTON

Porning in America

LOS ANGELES

Despite Barry Schwabsky’s kind words about my book, there’s a mistake in his March 15 “Shelf Life.” Making a smooth transition from another artist’s book to mine, Schwabsky suggests I am something I’m not: “Most artists...need day jobs; Smith pays the bills by having sex on camera under the nom de porn Zak Sabbath.”

Actually, I pay the bills by making drawings and paintings, and have done so since long before I knew anyone in porn. Adult films are a sideline for me, and the money I make there goes mostly to causes like Food Not Bombs and the West Memphis 3. I have never been a full-time adult performer or paid any bill with porn money. Since many of my friends here in Los Angeles (and in my book) are and do, I know that their job is, in many ways, far more demanding than sitting around an apartment making pictures of whatever comes into your head, and would not like anyone to think that I

have ever pretended to know all that they know—in my book or anywhere else.

ZAK SMITH

Schwabsky Replies

LONDON

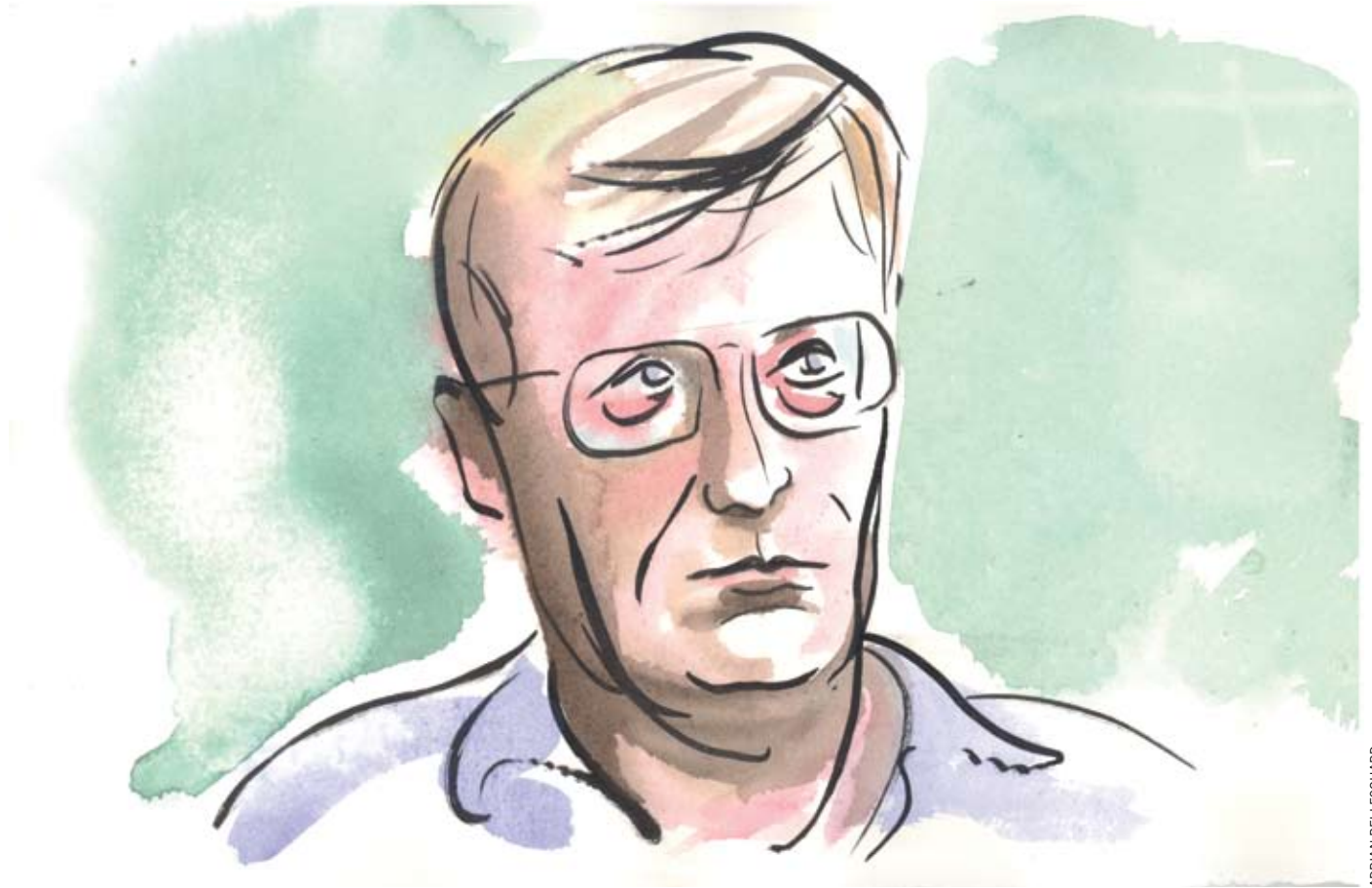
My apologies to Zak Smith. I should have expressed myself more clearly. I certainly did not intend to imply that doing any other sort of work means that an artist is unsuccessful as such. I called porn acting Smith’s “day job”; as a point of comparison, if I had said the same of, say, Charles Ray’s job teaching at UCLA, or Peter Halley’s at Yale, this would not be to imply that those artists are unsuccessful or can’t sell their work—this is evidently not the case, and I’m happy to be assured that the same is true of Smith, whose work I admire.

BARRY SCHWABSKY

Mind Your N’s and Q’s

In the bio for William R. Polk’s April 19 “Legitimation Crisis in Afghanistan,” it should have said that the title of his latest book is *Understanding Iran* (not Iraq).

Books & the Arts.



ADRIAN BELLESGUARD

Anderson's Amphibologies

by MARK MAZOWER

As a student during the 1980s, I gave the "European Union" section in the library a wide berth. The pall of soporific technocracy that hung over it made the adjacent shelves of books on law and political science enticing by comparison. A lot more has been written on the EU since then, most of it perpetuating that same "mortal dullness," to borrow a phrase from the historian Perry Anderson. Dullness, on the other hand, is one charge no one has ever levied at Anderson, whose new book, *The New Old World*, is as insightful, combative and invigorating as its illustrious

predecessors. Given Anderson's long and intimate engagement with Europe, both as an editor of the *New Left Review* and a regular contributor to the *London Review of Books* for the past two decades, one looks forward to what one gets—a bracing assault from somewhere on the left on the conventional Europieties, and new perspectives on the evolution, and likely future trajectory, of one of the most important political and cultural experiments of our time.

Anderson states the fundamental analytical difficulty of his project at the outset. Europe appears to be an "impossible object," constantly slipping among three quite distinct literatures. There are histories of the postwar continent, mostly written in the shadow of the cold war and paying little attention to the European Union; there is the vast outpouring of works, popular and

The New Old World

By Perry Anderson.
Verso. 561 pp. \$39.95.

scholarly, focusing not on Europe per se but on this or that European country. (The EU may be a polity of sorts, but the political and intellectual energies of most Europeans still flow at the national level.) Finally, there is what we might call professional EUrology: a series of interventions, chiefly by legal scholars and political scientists, on the technicalities of the integration process and its institutions. Given the amnesiac quality of much of this last in particular, Anderson's ability to move fluently among the three literatures, and above all to evaluate the EU as an ideology, is necessary and timely.

Anderson takes as his starting point a

Mark Mazower is the Ira D. Wallach Professor of History at Columbia University and the author, most recently, of *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton).

series of reflections on the work of the historian Alan Milward, who in *The Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1945–51* (1984), *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (1992) and *The Frontiers of National Sovereignty* (1993) demonstrated the degree to which the politics of the nation-state remained vital in explaining the postwar drive toward European integration. Milward's argument was that the revival of democracy in the nation-states of Western Europe, shaken by the experience of occupation and war, depended on the pursuit of prosperity through the rebuilding of cross-border economic networks. As this rebuilding took place, it became the motor of more permanent and far-reaching European cooperation. Ac-

Anderson links the rise of neoliberalism in Europe to the left's loss of ideological rigor.

cepting the basic insight, Anderson argues that Milward nevertheless exaggerates the degree to which this process was democratic; in fact, far from restoring and deepening democracy in Europe, as the EU's founders wished, the institutions they built have eroded and weakened it. This tendency has reached an apogee in the creation of a single currency defended by a powerful centralized monetary authority that exerts deflationary pressure on wages in order to guard the rigid conditions of the Stability and Growth Pact. The lack of comparably powerful legislatures at the European level means that the voice of the popular will is silenced. (A rare exception was the rejection by French and Dutch voters of the EU's constitutional treaty in 2005, a wrinkle ironed out by the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009.) Any democratic impulse in the integration process long ago withered away and has been replaced by an elitarian, even oligarchic form of consensus policy-making conducted behind closed doors and consummated in *faits accomplis*.

Anderson is significantly more admiring than Milward of the federalist impulses of EU architect Jean Monnet and his peers. He applauds their transnational vision, their *dirigiste* commitment to welfarism and their desire to set Europe on foundations that would allow it to forge its own path between the superpowers. At the same time, he insists that the federalists' idealism needs to be set against the enduring impact of continental geopolitics: France's fear of

Germany after World War II; West Germany's desire to rejoin the comity of powers; and above all, the brute reality of the American desire to see Europe as a stable garrison in the cold war. For Anderson, Europeans have simply failed to acknowledge their real status as an outpost of the American imperium; worse, over the decades from Truman to Bush II, they have become more subservient, not less.

Despite the disagreements, all this is presented with the utmost respect for Milward's intellectual achievement. (Indeed, Milward is the book's dedicatee.) The tone changes when Anderson takes up contemporary EUology, dispatching with gusto the various models—intergovernmentalist, confederalist, imperial—that social scientists have offered as guides to understanding what has become in only a few decades one of the most complex of contemporary political structures. Common to most if

not all versions of EUology, Anderson charges, is an overestimation of what the EU has really achieved, an underplaying of its continued geopolitical weakness and a complacency about its embrace of neoliberal economics. The lack of accountability in European institutions cannot be written off as easily as the mainstream scholarship assumes, nor should we excuse or dignify the Eurocrats' attempt to replace the guns and blood of political struggle with consensus reached through secret diplomacy.

That the initial chapters of *The New Old World* are based for the most part on pieces published previously in the *London Review of Books* does not make them any less valuable: such a penetrating and wide-ranging critique of the field is still rare. But at this point in the book, just when one expects Anderson to elaborate his own analysis of the European Union in more detail, he instead reprints a number of *tours d'horizon* of the three countries—Italy, France and Germany—that constitute what he terms the European “Core.” The shift in gears from the EUological to the national is abrupt and justified perfunctorily as though to set before our eyes that very impossibility of writing about Europe that Anderson notes to be such a striking feature of the intellectual landscape.

Part of the problem is that these pieces, although worth rereading, are in some cases quite old and have inevitably dated. (The

first part of the Germany chapter was originally published as an essay in the *LRB* in January 1999.) Anderson's political antennae, sensitive to considerations of the *longue durée*, are always closely attuned to the demands of the conjuncture. In his hands, historical analysis, massive and precisely crafted, invariably serves as ammunition in an unceasing war of position. Thus his essays, despite their dense scene-setting, distancing tone and expert knowledge, are nothing if not assessments of the moment. In this sense, though in almost no other, they resemble that effort at a “history of the present” that Anderson himself has castigated in the work of Timothy Garton Ash. (Like Garton Ash, Anderson focuses on the political class and its machinations; but whereas Garton Ash, in Anderson's view, cozies up to it and offers a view from over its shoulder, Anderson stands at a remove and is constantly unmasking it.)

There is another difficulty. Anderson singles out his Big Three not only because of their role in the European Union but also—perhaps primarily—for their predominant place in European cultural life. A strictly EUological intent might have suggested a different choice of candidates; momentum toward integration has frequently come, after all, either from smaller countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands or from the European Commission (the chief administrative organ of the EU). But Anderson's idealist bent pushes him away from such themes and back to the specificities of Old Europe's national *Kultur* bearers. In each case, the rise of neoliberalism is linked to the left's loss of ideological and philosophical vigor. Something of the former Gramscian is manifested here: the implication is that because the left lost the war of ideas in Italy, France and Germany, catastrophic political consequences followed. Once there were titans like Sartre and de Gaulle, runs the message; now we are left with BHL and Sarko. The tone is regretful; the analysis, acerbic. But the overarching political conception is surprisingly old-fashioned—what counts is Big Three politics, each mediated by the international balance of forces but unfolding largely within its national borders. Dealing with exactly the same three countries, historian Charles Maier once wrote a classic of comparative history, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe* (1975), in an effort to explain the wider mutation of political life and institutions across Europe after World War I. Anderson does not do this. As membership in the EU has expanded from six states to twenty-

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seven, he has remained focused on the Big Three. He sees the EU as one further—perhaps the last—triumph of the Western European bourgeoisie, but his eschewal of systematic comparison offers less guidance than Maier's on the reasons for its success.

These somber analyses of the hollowing out of Europe's Core are followed in a quite different vein by a sequence of essays (originally published in the *LRB* in 2008) on Cyprus and Turkey. Here we move from domestic institutions and struggles over national cultures to sweeping, morally charged narratives set in an emphatically geopolitical context. Anderson terms his subject the European

Anderson has a soft spot for tough-minded realists and neocons like Robert Kagan.

Union's "Eastern Question," in the belief that its treatment of Cyprus and Turkey reveals as much about the EU as the treatment of the old Eastern Question (the fall-out from the decay of the Ottoman Empire) did about the real nature of the Concert of Europe in the nineteenth century. This is, in short, all about the unmasking of European pretensions. Despite their fine talk about human rights, the Europeans have consistently left the Greek Cypriots in the lurch and acquiesced in Turkey's de facto partition of their island. At the same time, Anderson says, they have welcomed the prospect of Turkish membership, as EU policy-makers and polite opinion do their best to sweep inconvenient mention of the Armenian genocide under the carpet.

Anderson is in less familiar territory here, and it shows. His lengthy retelling of the Cyprus tragedy manages to be schoolmasterly and polemical at the same time. The pendant pieces on Turkey push tendentiousness further. He exaggerates the chances of Turkish membership in the EU (which currently look bleak, since Europeans, *pace* Anderson, do not do everything the Americans tell them to). But it is the history offered here that is uncharacteristically ropy. Having reminded us at the outset that the European Union is dealing with the descendant of an imperial state, he warns that the early modern Ottoman Empire was "designed for the battlefield, without territorial fixture or definition." One could as easily describe the British Empire in analogous terms, but to

what end? The character of states is not fixed by their origins, and even when such assertions about empires are true, they are idle as guides to the present outlook and behavior of their postimperial successors. As for his suggestion that nineteenth-century imperial reforms failed to transform the religious foundations of Ottoman rule, this is scarcely borne out by the facts. If political Islam emerged in the late nineteenth century as a new program for the empire—dismissed by Anderson, with a typical impatience for the politics of piety, as "ideological bluster"—it was precisely because of the dramatic impact of the reform program on Islam's place in Ottoman society.

A matter highly relevant to the worldview of the Turkish political elite also deserves more weight than Anderson devotes to it: namely, the massive human cost of imperial decline, as millions of Muslims over the century after 1821 were forced to abandon their lands in the arc from Greece through the Balkans to the Caucasus, and made a new home in Anatolia. But accounting for that forced migration would have complicated and contextualized the story of the Armenian genocide, which is Anderson's real subject. It would have required explanation rather than indictment. One would have had to situate the genocide, for instance, within the embrace by the Committee of Union and Progress, the ruling party at the time, of a much more sweeping population politics, one that identified a bewildering range of ethnic groups—Christian and Muslim—as suspect and potentially disloyal elements, and brought to the fore the tight interconnection between the bureaucracies of mass murder and refugee resettlement during World War I.

As for the politics of the memory of the genocide, too much in Anderson's charge sheet is dictated by rhetorical positioning. It is true, as he says, that the Turkish elite has connived in a silence about the genocide that remains hard, indeed dangerous, to break. But his allegation that European sympathies in this matter are on the side of Turkey's Kemalist, secular elite strains belief. Turkey's cover-up has been denounced in the French Parliament, the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, among other venues. Of the many reasons Europeans are balking at Turkish membership, this is not the least important. And while it is certainly correct that Western historians of modern Turkey fight shy of

using the "G-word" (just as Soviet historians used to weigh carefully what might jeopardize their access to the archives), this professional deformation does not inhibit the European commentariat that Anderson unnecessarily pillories.

A litany of authorial errors serves little purpose. It is more useful to explain the peculiarities of Anderson's perspective and tone. Fundamentally, this book charts the reaction to a deep and evidently wounding disappointment, one that has more to do with Anderson's ideas than can be explained solely by the global rise of neoliberalism and the long retreat of the left. It is Europe, perhaps above all, that has disappointed him. From very early in the history of the *New Left Review*, which turns fifty this year, Anderson embraced a Europeanist position for at least three reasons. First, it offered a convenient perch from which to lambaste the parochialism of the British left. Second, one could imagine that the regional concentration of power achieved by the Western European bourgeoisie through the economic integration process in the 1950s might paradoxically—if the left ever got its hands on the reins—pave the way for a coordinated continental path to socialism. And third, perhaps most important, the *New Left Review* regarded (Western) Europe as a kind of cultural and intellectual font and devoted itself to disseminating the works of Gramsci, Althusser, Mandel and many other social theorists previously neglected or unknown in the Anglo-Saxon world.

So far as the first of these reasons is concerned, the battle is over. The British Labour Party is now more unambiguously pro-European than the Tories, and Europe is not by and large a major bone of contention within it. As for the third reason, the scale of the achievement of the *New Left Review* and its associated imprint, Verso, which turns forty this year, is now clear: their dissemination of Euro-Marxism influenced intellectual life in Britain, especially on its campuses. But this did not have any greater political impact, since the universities were never, as the *NLR* once anticipated, the "weak link" of capitalism. Worse still, the fountainhead of ideas has dried up, and the European left is—so Anderson suggests—intellectually bankrupt.

This brings us to the remaining reason for Anderson's embrace of a Europeanist position: the chances of turning the European Union into an engine of socialism, or at least of social democracy. As late as 1998,

Anderson was still willing to see this as a possibility; in an exchange with the Italian philosopher Norberto Bobbio, he anticipated that if the German Social Democratic Party won elections that year, “the four major countries of Western Europe... will for the first time in history be ruled simultaneously by governments declaredly of the Left. This constellation would occur just as the great project of a single continental currency comes into being. The power to reshape the conditions of life for the peoples of Europe for the better would lie in the hands of the official Left, across national frontiers, in a way that it has never done before.” The Social Democratic Party did prevail, and under Gerhard Schröder it did form a government, but the outcome belied Anderson’s hopes. In short order, the Schröder government cut taxes, reduced welfare benefits and sent German troops into combat (in Kosovo and Afghanistan) for the first time since World War II. It was the latest in a series of disappointments—in the EU, its institutions, its electorates—that has left Anderson facing a Europe very different from the one he has believed in over so many years.

What is left for him, then, but to pour scorn upon the pretensions of contemporary liberal Euroboosters? Do they see Europe as a beacon of light, a reminder of a better world than that across the Atlantic? They forget, says Anderson, that the European Union in geopolitical terms is nothing more than a “deputy empire.” Do they praise it for having devised a postconflictual form of politics? Prove them wrong by reminding them that key member states retain strong senses of their own self-interest. All of this makes Anderson enjoyable to read. But it also makes him a better prosecutor than judge.

The desire to rout the liberals and pick holes in their woolly self-delusions leads Anderson into strange company. In particular, he has a soft spot for tough-minded realists and neocons. Robert Kagan is commended for providing, in *Of Paradise and Power* (2003), the best account of Europe’s subservience to the United States; *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* (2009), Christopher Caldwell’s assault on the hypocrisies of immigration debate in the EU, is said to break “free from the prevailing morass of sanctimony and evasion” thanks to “the clarity of its historical analysis and sharpness of its comparative perspective.” Not that Anderson cannot spot the weaknesses in the realists’ and neocons’ arguments; but their readiness to ignore taboos, to castigate the

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self-satisfaction of Old Europe's elites, is something he seems to relish.

So too is their geopolitical realism. In Anderson's Europe, one is constantly waiting for the old demons to return. Unified Germany in particular is depicted as a potential Bismarckian, if not quite Nazi, *Grossmacht* ready to impose its will on its cowering neighbors; the European Union is a new Concert of Powers replaying in a new key the old struggle for mastery. Throughout *The New Old World*, present-day presidents and prime ministers are termed "rulers," their governments "regimes," as though to imply their fundamental illegitimacy—despite their electoral victories. It is a view of the continent—and its voters—that sits oddly with the other plank of the Andersonian critique: the EU's lack of democracy. Either power has relocated in some unaccountable way to the neoliberal corridors of Brussels, voiding national politics of much of its autonomy, or in fact it remains in the hands of the Germans, the French and other would-be hegemon. Anderson wants us to fear the old tyrannies and the new one at the same time, but this seems inconsistent, if not incoherent.

Elitism can take many forms, of course. Anderson's political goals have, on the showing of this book, moderated considerably over time: what counts now for him in Europe is the revival of popular politics and the struggle against growing economic inequality. But if previous positions have been tacitly abandoned, there has been no diminution in authorial certainty: the tone of omniscience remains for the most part intact, and there are flashes of the author's trademark hauteur. More discordant with his avowedly democratizing goals, it seems to me, is his prose. Connoisseurs of Andersoniana will enjoy *recherché* gems such as "amphibology," "capsizal" and "conflictivity." Without touching on the *obiter dicta* in French, German, Latin and Italian, we find, in only a few pages, "decathexis," "semicatallaxy," "paralogism" and "censitary," alongside archaisms like "estoppage," "prebends" and "brigade" (used as a verb). Such language stands as testimony to elitism of a different kind, that of a small substratum of the postwar British left whose basically Leninist conception of radical politics led them to abjure too close a contact with the masses, whose ultimate victory they supposedly championed. But now another kind of elitism, much more impenetrable in word and deed, is in the ascendant in Europe. Anderson is good at puncturing its self-serving myths. But the explanation of its staying power must be sought elsewhere. ■



Still from *Parole* (2010), by Sharon Hayes

Scattered Threads

by BARRY SCHWABSKY

In 1932 *New York Times* art critic Edward Alden Jewell greeted with enthusiasm the Whitney Museum's plan to mount a biennial exhibition of American painting; a show of sculpture, drawings, watercolors and prints would then run in the alternate years. "In the course of a typical New York season the galleries and museums place on view quantities of American art and one is always enabled to study the work of individual artists in considerable detail," he conceded. "But the value of comprehensive group displays hardly needs emphasizing. By such means scattered threads are woven into a single strand and a broad survey of the field becomes possible." Back then the exhibitions were not curated in the current sense of the word. Once invited, each artist was free to choose what work to present. The Whitney's founding director, Juliana Force, put it clearly: "We send out our invitations and each artist may wear what he pleases to our party."

These days the quantity of art on view in New York is so great that only professional obligation or genuine obsession—or, more likely, both at once—could compel anyone to delve "in considerable detail" into more than a small swatch of the proffered efforts. What's more, the art world is so internationalized that there are significant American artists who, for one reason or another, are exhibited more often abroad than at home. An overview is therefore even more necessary now than it was in the days of Force and Jewell, but it's all the harder to come by. Every friend I met in the days after my visit to this year's Biennial, which was curated by Francesco Bonami and Gary Carrion-

Murayari and will run through May 30, had more or less the same question: what does it say about the situation of art today?

Good question—and just the one Bonami and Carrion-Murayari raise by titling the exhibition not thematically but simply with the year "2010." Yet there is more than one way to look at a question like that. One might assume it means, What's in? What's out? What's hot? What's not? That's to have an eye trained on fashions in art—and don't turn up your nose at it, if only because the reactionary's favorite pose is to pretend that everything new or unfamiliar in art is passing fashion or an old idea recycled. In the art of our time we seek a reflection of the time, and it's always passing. Baudelaire admonished that beauty contains a transient element as well as an eternal one. He imagined, for instance, a sequence of historical fashion plates, "from the origins of France to the present day," with the clothes of each era juxtaposed with "the philosophic thought which that age was mainly preoccupied with or worried by, a thought which the illustration inevitably reflects." This curious notion of a seductive image accompanied by a deep and possibly anxious thought is more tellingly allied to art than costume.

We expect that thought to be anxious even more than we expect it to be deep—anxiety is always in fashion—or rather, we can't help thinking that a thought that's not anxious isn't deep. That's why it's so dismaying to read, on the first page of the curators' introduction to the Biennial's catalog, that "with the election of Barack Obama, the clouds broke and the rain of renewal poured over the entire coun-

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try.” Hokey metaphors aside—and hokey metaphors abound in this text—one fears that the curators are about to tell us not only that the forty-fourth president has been sent by Providence to save the nation but that his secondary mission is to rain renewingly on art until it has become washed-out and boring. Luckily, all is not well. Bonami and Carrion-Murayari are pleased to announce in their catalog that “the image of the body that 2010 presents is one that is shaped by physical, spiritual, or social violence. The individuals depicted...bear the scars of war, discrimination, and hatred.”

But if this is so, the question remains, What’s new about that? What is there in this Biennial that pertains to our time and no

tween the painfulness of its subject and the finesse of its representation, the emotional dichotomy between the injunction to avert one’s eyes and the desire to look, is contained within the work itself. The photographs from Sinclair’s series “Self-Immolation: A Cry for Help” (2003-05) perhaps issue the contrary demand: you must not refuse to look at this. But unless you have sufficient medical training to have been desensitized to scenes of horror, these images are very difficult to look at. That they exist, one feels, is important, but in the way that a piece of evidence is important. “In response to the widespread attention these images received,” the catalog explains, “a new burn unit was created in Herat, Afghanistan.”

Photographs are unlikely to alleviate a desperation so acute that the only available protest is to attempt a spectacular form of suicide, but it’s encouraging to learn that at least they can provoke an effort to succor the

survivors. Sinclair’s work points to the limits of art and intends to act beyond them.

Displayed in a museum, such images drain power from the works surrounding them; everything else seems trivial in the face of such profound suffering. Works like Vance’s intimate, contemplative paintings, hanging not far away, might appear escapist by comparison. In the catalog, Vance is quoted describing her paintings as a continuation of the tradition of still-life painting, but in such a way that they “part with their spatial and physical references and form a more malleable, even intuitive space, a tactile yet totally fictitious abstraction.” The paintings are not only beautiful; they possess an ontological weight that lends credence to her ambition that they be worthy of considering in relation to the great tradition of European painting. One might even say that in their own way, and if only through their distant echoes of that tradition, they concern themselves with mortality. What’s so refreshing about these works is their insistence that ambition in art is not a matter of grand scale, extravagant imagery or epic subject matter—that art can also be next to nothing.

But how can we give our time and attention to works that focus on formal and philosophical issues arising from our experience with artificially cultivated perceptual conundrums when, as images like Sinclair’s remind us, people are dying—or living lives that they find more unbearable than the most painful death? Such a question has any

number of cogent answers, but it’s not easy to call them to mind while in the vicinity of imagery so disturbing. My argument is not with Sinclair’s commitment to document realities that most of us find hard to face even in pictures, let alone in person. Rather, it is with the curators’ inability to articulate their exhibition in a way that establishes a dialectic between the aesthetic and topical aspects of contemporary art. The threads Jewell spoke of in 1932 remain scattered.

Needless to say, most of the art in this year’s Biennial is neither entirely abstract and introspective nor purely documentary in nature. The self-reflective thinking characteristic of Vance’s art is shared by very different kinds of work, some of it overtly political. I was particularly impressed by R.H. Quaytman’s *Distracting Distance, Chapter 16* (2010), a cycle of paintings conceived in response to the architecture of the room in which they were exhibited as well as to an Edward Hopper painting in the Whitney’s collection, depicting a nude woman standing, a cigarette in her hand, in a sunlit bedroom. Combining abstract patterning with silkscreened photographic imagery, Quaytman offers a witty, disenchanted yet subtly sensual meditation on art’s dependence on and conflict with its institutions. And besides, these days there’s something pleasingly subversive about a picture of someone smoking in a museum.

One of the most memorable pieces in the show is *Parole* (2010), a video installation by Sharon Hayes. I could say it concerns a woman sound recordist at work in somewhat the same way I could say that *Ulysses* is about a guy wandering around Dublin. On multiple screens inside a jerry-built enclosure, we see Hayes’s silent and rather butch redheaded protagonist in various situations. She is apparently pure witness, someone who records the voices of others without needing to make her own voice heard. Still, she makes her presence felt: in *Parole*’s most striking scene, we see her recording someone of ambiguous gender reading a stirring manifesto on lesbian rights, which becomes even more extraordinary when one realizes that it was written by the German activist Anna Rüling in 1904. The scene is shot mostly in close-up; the recordist is holding her microphone up to the speaker’s face, and because the distance between the people and the circling camera is so short, their heads seem to eclipse each other. This dance of proclaiming and recording is both aggressive and erotic. I couldn’t help thinking of the climactic scene of Ingmar Bergman’s *Persona* (1966), in which the two female protagonists, one of them silent, seem to

‘2010’ does not address the question of what pertains to our time rather than any other.

other? War, discrimination and hatred, unfortunately, seem eternal, not transient. Perhaps what is most symptomatic of the moment is not any of the particular works included in “2010” (I will humor the curators by following their lead in referring to the exhibition and the year as if they were nearly identical) but in their seemingly random juxtaposition. One of the things I liked best about this Biennial is that it includes fewer artists than its most recent predecessors and therefore allots more space to each one. But this has also led to the artists’ works being presented in a way that is more self-contained, and so a grouping with scant coherence ends up seeming even more disjointed than it might have otherwise.

As a result, there appears to be an unbridgeable gap between what the curators call the “personal modernism” of abstract artists like Lesley Vance, Roland Flexner and Tauba Auerbach and the hot-button topicality of documentary photographers Nina Berman and Stephanie Sinclair. These represent the show’s two poles, though most artists fall somewhere in between. Sinclair’s images of Afghan women who had set themselves on fire in response to abuse from husbands and families are documents in the purest sense, repulsing any aesthetic or contemplative gaze whatsoever. I thought of a Goya print from his “Disasters of War” series—the one showing a massacre, which he captioned, “This is not to be looked at.” The difference is that Goya’s image is one you are drawn to look at; the disconnect be-

exchange identities as the camera closes in on them. In *Parole* it's not personal identity that's at stake, not even in the highly meta-physical sense in which *Persona* entertains the notion. Hayes is more concerned with questions of address: who is saying what to whom, and who hears it. Her piece may not be entirely coherent, but its abundant passion and intelligence are exhilarating.

If you're looking for portents of the present in contemporary art, it's possible you should look less to art itself than to its relation to the market. A major barrier between commercial and theoretically noncommercial sides of the art world was broken in January, when art dealer Jeffrey Deitch was appointed director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. While it's always been possible for people from the museum world to bail out and go for bigger bucks in the private sector, the reverse move has been shunned until now. (Retired generals can go to work for defense contractors, but one doesn't appoint an executive from Northrop Grumman to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.) Now the net that holds artists, dealers, collectors and ostensibly educational and charitable nonprofit institutions has been drawn much tighter than ever before.

Deitch, a onetime art critic who got himself an MBA and went into business, was much on my mind as I visited the New Museum in New York City recently. It struck me that you don't have to be a director to leave your mark on an institution; in fact, you needn't ever have been employed there. Deitch's fingerprints are all over the New Museum, thanks to the exhibition "Skin Fruit: Selections From the Dakis Joannou Collection," curated by Jeff Koons and on view there through June 6. Deitch was for many years an adviser to the Greek collector and New Museum trustee; it was he who first showed Koons's work to Joannou, in 1985. For Joannou's Deste Foundation, Deitch curated some exhibitions that reverberated far beyond Athens, notably "Cultural Geometry" (1988), "Artificial Nature" (1990) and "Post Human" (1992-93). Deitch's vision has always been imbued with a disconcertingly cheerful dystopianism. "An artist can still pack a portable easel and hike into the mountains to sketch a small section of wilderness," he wrote in an essay for "Artificial Nature" that is reprinted in the "Skin Fruit" catalog, "but a truly contemporary artist might be better advised to seek truth in nature in a strip mine or in the visitors' center of a game preserve. To immerse oneself in nature today



An installation view of "Skin Fruit," an exhibition at the New Museum

is to uncover layers of chaotic exploitation and man-made 'improvements.' *Genuine nature may now be more artificial than natural.*"

Like Deitch's appointment as director of LA MoCA, "Skin Fruit" incited an uproar the moment the exhibition was announced, and in some circles it was decried as a betrayal. In its first incarnation, under the direction of its founder, Marcia Tucker, the New Museum's countercultural bent was patent. She had been a curator at the Whitney, but the exhibitions she organized proved uncomfortably radical for the museum's trustees and for critics like the *Times's* Hilton Kramer, so in 1977, she was cut adrift. Why not start an institution as experimental as the art it's meant to show? As Roberta Smith put it in an obituary for Tucker, the New Museum under her leadership was "a somewhat chaotic, idealistic place where the nature of art was always in question, exhibitions were a form of consciousness raising and mistakes were inevitable. She also wanted the museum to welcome art that was excluded elsewhere because it was difficult, out of fashion, unsalable or made by artists who were not white or male or straight." For those who treasured *that* New Museum, giving the building over to a private collection without even entrusting the selection from it to one of the museum's own curators was the last straw. The museum, they figured, had completely sold out to the market. But if that's true, it's merely the culmination of a much longer process; after all, one floor of the museum is already named for Joannou.

The counterargument to these claims would be that so much has changed since 1977 that the old distinctions no longer hold. Today, almost everything is salable, and collectors seek out difficult art with relish. Take

Tino Sehgal, whose work seems intentionally designed to frustrate market demands: it consists of actions to be performed but without any documentation or written instructions. His exhibition at the Guggenheim earlier this year was one of the best I've seen in a long while, a poignant meditation on progress, time and aging, which used the visitor's stroll up the museum's spiral as its underlying metaphor. His piece for the New Museum is simpler: one of the museum guards sings, "This is propaganda." That's about it. I'll be interested to see what price that might eventually fetch at auction.

In any case, wouldn't you rather see an exhibition curated by an artist like Koons—whose work has, at least at times, been genuinely significant—than one organized by a professional curator? No one has ever installed works of art in this unsympathetic space with as much clarity and elegance as Koons. But how is his judgment as a selector of works? That's hard to answer without having seen the rest of the collection. I was a little taken aback to notice that while Chris Ofili, one of my favorite painters, has four pieces here, they are not among his best; one was probably the weakest Ofili painting I've seen. True, Ofili has a retrospective on display in London right now, and it includes much stronger paintings from Joannou's holdings. But this raises the question of whether a big collection is necessarily a great one. Wouldn't Joannou's Ofili collection be stronger if it were smaller but more rigorously selected? Undoubtedly, but then he might find it more useful to be known as a "big" collector than a fastidious one.

As for the idea that today's collectors and the institutions made in their image no longer shy away from difficult art, there's

some support for that in “Skin Fruit.” Half of the works on view could have cost a curator her job in 1977. Indeed, like a number of other prominent collectors of contemporary art—Charles Saatchi and François Pinault come to mind—Joannou could be accused of nursing a taste for sensationalism, as evinced, for instance, by works from Ashley Bickerton, Paul McCarthy and the team of Tim Noble and Sue Webster, among others.

There’s clearly a love of grandiosity at work in “Skin Fruit,” a fascination with overweening scale and visual ostentation as signs of artistic importance. Needless to say, that’s a pretty lame criterion, but the catalog writers seem to have struggled bravely to present the collection as having a core philosophy, one with “an obvious connection to the humanistic tradition of classical Greek culture,” no less. They invoke “new images of man” to describe the collection’s subject, evoking a much-criticized 1959 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art that proposed figurative expressionism as an antidote to abstraction. There were some great artists in that show—Bacon, Dubuffet, Giacometti—but will Joannou’s new new-imagists turn out to be as important, or are they more likely to slip from view, along with the likes of Kenneth Armitage, Rico Lebrun and Germaine Richier? More the latter, I’m afraid.

Even so, there’s a great deal of interesting work on view here; I’m always happy to see anything by David Altmejd, Nathalie Djurberg, Kara Walker or Gillian Wearing. And it’s work that clearly aligns with the program the New Museum has been pursuing all along. Urs Fischer, prominently featured in “Skin Fruit,” recently had a solo show at the New Museum, and most of the pieces on view would have slotted comfortably into previous group shows like “Unmonumental” and “Younger Than Jesus.” It’s hard to claim that the museum has compromised any principles by accommodating Joannou’s holdings, but that’s precisely the problem: it is no longer easy to see how there is any substantive difference between the interests of the art market and those of the art museum, and so efforts to maintain a hands-off relationship between the two seem increasingly artificial.

Yet just as much as art needs the market to survive in a market-driven society, it needs its distance from the market if its survival is to count for anything. In the end “Skin Fruit” is another nondescript group show of fashionable art. There was no strong reason to mount it but no strong reason not to do so either. It’s business as usual, and I only wish I could feel that art as usual did not make such an easy fit with it. ■

A Caller of the Dove

by JORDAN DAVIS

Arab poets have never lacked for attention. One pre-Islamic poet’s fame among his tribe drove a rival to observe and ask, “The Taghlibites have been made oblivious to every high exploit/by a single ode that Amr son of Kulthum composed;/they recite it eternally from the moment they are born—/what sort of men are they, never to tire of a poem?” If you were a Taghlibite, you’d recite it too. The only respite in the poem from boasts about white banners brought back from battle “crimson, well-saturated” and “forearms flying like play-chucks” are more boasts: “When any boy of ours reaches his weaning/the tyrants fall down before him prostrating.” According to accounts of the poet’s life, Amr came by his taste for gore and righteousness honestly. He is said to have avenged an insult to his mother by cutting off the head of the same king who had murdered Tarafa, a fellow poet.

Tarafa’s and Amr’s best-known poems (Amr’s only poem, if the critic quoted above is correct) are found in the Mu’allaqat, a collection of seven odes, arguably the greatest achievements of secular Arab literature. They retain this standing despite the outlandish episodes that define the work, such as the come-on that begins, “Many’s the pregnant woman like you, aye, and the nursing mother/I’ve night visited, and made her forget her amuleted one-year-old.” The Prophet Muhammad reproached that poet, Imru al-Qais, as “the most poetical of the poets, and their leader into Hell-fire.” (It will not surprise his readers that Frederick Seidel claims to have been translating Imru al-Qais for twenty years.)

Though his capacity for shock bears little comparison to the poets of the Mu’allaqat, the late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish inspires in his work similar devotion in the Arab diaspora. Darwish was 6 when his family fled from Palestine to Lebanon in 1948, and he remembered vividly the coldness of the flight through mountain passes and the strangeness of being declared a “present-absent alien” upon returning to the new-named land, his village razed and effectively erased. His first poetry reading drew a dressing-down from the Israeli military governor. He was 8.

Jordan Davis’s poems have appeared recently in Poetry and The Nation.

As a teenager, he took part in poetry festivals throughout Galilee, and by his early 20s he had perfected an aggressive, self-mocking style that would have made him a perpetual winner of international poetry slams, if that eternally rediscovered combat had been active then:

Write it down!
I am an Arab
And my identity card number is fifty thousand.
I have eight children
And the ninth is coming after the summer.
Makes you angry, doesn’t it?

An exile at home, he saw no reason not to wander, first to study in Moscow, then to live in Cairo, Beirut, Paris and Amman, finally returning to Ramallah. Along the way, and during a bout of weariness with the role of unofficial laureate of a cornered, homeless people, he set aside his public, incantatory poetry to write a prose account of the siege of Beirut, during which rockets and shells flew into the city sometimes more than once a second. *Memory for Forgetfulness* is a page-turning comedy of horrors: “Two hours ago I went to sleep. I plugged my ears with cotton and went to sleep after hearing the last newscast. It didn’t report I was dead. That means I’m still alive.” Even readers disinclined to set aside the fact that Darwish served on the Executive Committee of the PLO have to admire his meditations on coffee—its aroma, one’s idiosyncratic rituals for making it and the impossibility of observing those rituals while under missile attack, its endless variations:

There’s no flavor we might label “the flavor of coffee” because coffee is not a concept, or even a single substance. And it’s not an absolute. Everyone’s coffee is special, so special that I can tell one’s taste and elegance of spirit by the flavor of the coffee. Coffee with the flavor of coriander means the woman’s kitchen is not organized. Coffee with the flavor of carob juice means the host is stingy. Coffee with the aroma of perfume means the lady is too concerned with appearances. Coffee that feels like moss in the mouth means its maker is an infantile leftist. Coffee that tastes stale from

too much turning over in the hot water means its maker is an extreme rightist. And coffee with the overwhelming flavor of cardamom means the lady is newly rich.

Memory for Forgetfulness eventually exhibits signs of strain similar to those that come halfway through *The Captive Mind*, Czeslaw Milosz's account of life in Communist Poland. Rational analysis of totalitarianism suddenly gives way to intense and justifiably paranoid irritability. The strain is the point, and anyone can feel it. If Darwish had written nothing further, this book alone would be a major achievement. As it happens, he appears to have wanted rather more—to write a contemporary poem that would stand with the Mu'allaqat.

While Darwish has long been the most widely translated of modern Arab poets—there are twice as many collections in English of his writing as there are of his nearest colleague, the Syrian poet Adonis—until recently, American readers have been entitled to some skepticism toward the poems. Like post-Stalin-era favorites Yannis Ritsos and Pablo Neruda, Darwish published a lot. (Arab critics characterize his prolific habits by referring charitably to a “fountain” quality.) And the virtues of his later work are clearer in his longer poems than in the one- or two-page lyrics that mark the limit of the space most American literary journals allocate. It would not be wrong to think the short poems of Darwish's countrymen Samih al-Qasim and Taha Muhammed Ali have a bite that Darwish's quicker takes often lack. Without the momentum of a sustained argument, the horses and roses and anemones and butterflies that fill his poems come to sound decorative, interchangeable from one poem to the next. It may just be the translations.

Of the four new translations of Darwish's last books, two (*Mural*, translated by Rema Hammami and John Berger, and *If I Were Another*, translated by Fady Joudah) feature the same long poem. “Mural” is remarkably sturdy. While neither of the new English versions—nor the one published in 2003 in *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*, and translated by Munir Akash and Carolyn Forché—is completely satisfying (in fact, all are often frustratingly vague), the poem is nevertheless a tour de force, Darwish's best claim to have written a modern Mu'allaqat. If “Mural” does not quite match the unlimited repeatability of the Taghlibite ode, at forty-plus pages, it still serves at once as an anthem

for lost Arab nations from al-Andalus to Palestine, a subliminal introduction to the poetry of the Middle East, a masque with speeches by Gilgamesh and Solomon and dialogues with an Israeli jailor and Death, and a weary rapprochement of the poet with conflicting demands for public rallying cries and evocative private references. It ought to be too much. For the skeptical reader—the only kind poetry still deserves—it will almost seem not enough.

Darwish wrote “Mural” in 1999 while recovering from major surgery (in this and

In This Essay

A River Dies of Thirst

Journals.

By Mahmoud Darwish.

Translated by Catherine Cobham.

Archipelago. 153 pp. Paper \$16.

Mural

By Mahmoud Darwish.

Translated by Rema Hammami and John Berger.

Verso. 68 pp. \$19.95.

If I Were Another

By Mahmoud Darwish.

Translated by Fady Joudah.

Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 201 pp. \$28.

Almond Blossoms and Beyond

By Mahmoud Darwish.

Translated by Mohammad Shaheen.

Interlink Books. 95 pp. \$25.

Mahmoud Darwish

Exile's Poet.

Edited by Hala Khamis Nassar and Najat Rahman.

Olive Branch Press. 377 pp. Paper \$25.

other qualities, the poem is reminiscent of John Ashbery's major long poem, “A Wave,” which he wrote after recovering from a serious illness in 1982). The poem begins with what may be a reference to Adonis's best known poem, or may simply be his nurse's greeting after the operation: “This is your name.” Where Adonis uses the line for portent and splendor, Darwish, the supreme poet of exile in a century given to creating refugees, greets his own name warily. It's only something else he knows he'll be forced to leave. In the near-death experience that follows, a “sea hanging above a roof of white clouds/in the sky of the absolute white nothingness,” in the Hammami/Berger translation, even emptiness is taken away.

“Every poet is an exile to some extent,” Hala Khamis Nassar and Najat Rahman say in the introduction to their collection, *Mahmoud Darwish: Exile's Poet*, pointing out that in his case, exile is more than a mere literary device; it's a physical condition affecting his health and spirits every day. Nassar quotes Edward Said's remark in *Reflections on Exile* that to “see a poet in exile—as opposed to reading the poetry of exile—is to see exile's antinomies embodied and endured with a unique intensity.” The key terms here are “endured” and “intensity.” Over time, exile refined away any self-pity, sarcasm or rebelliousness that may have marred Darwish's poems, leaving only a pure, continuous astonishment at having to live out the designation he received in 1949, “present-absent alien.” As Said had it, Darwish endured “to transform the lyrics of loss into the indefinitely postponed drama of return.”

If *I Were Another* is the second collection of translations of Darwish by Fady Joudah, a recent winner of the Yale Series of Younger Poets prize (for his book *The Earth in the Attic*) and a Palestinian-American physician for Doctors Without Borders. Along with *Mural*, *If I Were Another* features three other collections: *I See What I Want* (1990), *Eleven Planets* (1992) and *Exile* (2005). Joudah's introduction argues that *I See What I Want* is a transitional work between the early performances of a nation's anger and the later subjective epics. Indeed, the long poems “Take Care of the Stags, Father,” “The Tragedy of Narcissus the Comedy of Silver” and “The Hoopoe” all rehearse the symphonic organization of the great last qasidas, as do “The ‘Red Indian’s’ Penultimate Speech to the White Man,” “We Will Choose Sophocles” and “Rita's Winter,” from the explicitly personal *Eleven Planets*.

Both Joudah's volume and Mohammad Shaheen's translation of *Almond Blossoms and Beyond* include four of Darwish's last major poems, but unlike with the multiple versions of “Mural,” here the comparison is clearer. Shaheen's versions are so much less cluttered, so much more moving, that it may take a few readings to recognize that Joudah is even referring to the same text. (Joudah: “Dream/slowly... no matter how often you dream you'll realize/the butterfly didn't burn to illuminate you”; Shaheen: “Dream slowly,/and whatever you dream, understand/that the moth does not burn to give you light.”)

Only Berger and Hammami include “The Dice Player,” Darwish's last poem

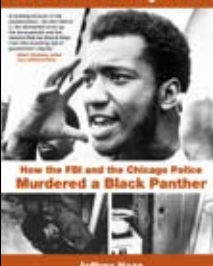
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The Assassination of Fred Hampton



and one he did not survive to include in a collection. Compared with their version, Joudah's translation, which appeared in the Winter 2009 issue of *Virginia Quarterly Review*, sings. It is not collected here, giving hope that Joudah will reprint it in a third, less stage-frightened collection in the fullness of time.

The language in Joudah's previous Darwish diwan, *The Butterfly's Burden*, is both sonically rich and refreshingly direct, marked by active constructions with a force that makes Darwish's dream-logic assertions ecstatic and natural: "your shirt button bears in its glare/the secret word of birds of every sort." Not every piece there holds together, but the best, such as a love poem from a bed to a couple, are thrilling:

Of night, I love the beginning, when
you two come together
hand in hand, and bit by bit embrace
me one section at a time
then in flight take me, higher. Stay
my friends, don't hurry

According to Syrian critic Subhi Hadidi, the book from which that poem is taken, *The Stranger's Bed*, marked a turn in Darwish's poems. He would no longer imagine what it would be like to be Sirhan Bishara Sirhan drinking coffee in a cafeteria. In the new poems he would reject calls to violent action and instead pursue the lyric epic, a paradox equal to his "present-absent" status (and a paradox pursued, at different times and places in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, by poets as various as Ezra Pound, Nathaniel Mackey and Constantine Cavafy). Toward that end, he derived a love poetry in part from the eleventh-century Andalusian philosopher Ibn Hazm, who in his treatise on love, *The Collar of the Dove*, writes that "the secret of intermingling in creatures is communication, and the secret of separation among them is difference. Form always calls for similar form; we tend to lean towards resemblance, and affinity is tangibly at work and has visible influence."

Doves turn up throughout all three English versions of "Mural," but only in Joudah's version are they also (correctly, I believe) identified as allusions to Ibn Hazm's book. Near the end of the poem, Darwish contrasts himself with those who still seek an epic view of life. Berger and Hammami render the couplet as "Eagles are for bards/for me/the dove's collar." In *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise* Akash and Forché take a similar approach: "Heroes have their eagles,/mine is a ring-necked dove." Here's Joudah: "The epicists have falcons, and I have/*The Col-*

lar of the Dove." Joudah's erudition inspires confidence, but as poetry none of these versions is particularly persuasive. At the low end of their ranges, Joudah is stuffy, Berger and Hammami are brusque, and Akash and Forché overpolish to the point of vagueness. Each also has moments of triumph that shine like metal among the dross. Berger and Hammami take Darwish's soaring feelings at the sight of even one stream of Palestine as "enough to solder the ancient myths onto the falcon's wing." Akash and Forché render Darwish's irony about poeticizing his childhood with a metaphor: "distance is a skilled blacksmith/who can turn worthless iron into moonlight." For his part, Joudah translates Darwish's sublimest reproach as clearly and memorably as possible. "Everything that exceeds its limit/becomes its own opposite one day." Solomon is a character in the poem; perhaps he'd recommend that readers interested in Darwish consult all three versions.

The best concise new introduction to the variety of Darwish's work is *A River Dies of Thirst*, Catherine Cobham's translation of his last poetry collection to appear in Arabic, short prose pieces and sketches for poems. While occasionally preachy and melodramatic ("We will become a people, if we want to, when we learn that we are not/angels, and that evil is not the prerogative of others"), every piece by Cobham's Darwish resolves satisfyingly, and the vague patches are few. Also worth noting is a true-to-life panegyric for Edward Said in *Almond Blossoms and Beyond*.

In his *History of Modern Palestine*, Israeli historian Ilan Pappé broke from official accounts of the events of 1948 to try to imagine the events not only as a series of leaders' actions and counteractions but as an as-yet-unresolved catastrophe that continues to affect the daily lives of everyone anywhere near Palestine, and many elsewhere:

Among the cultural elite, one group stands out as united, and aloof from the tension between collaboration with the Jewish state and opposition to it. These were the poets. Poetry was the one area in which national identity survived the Nakbah unscathed. What political activists did not dare express, poets sang out with force.

As tenth-century poet al-Mutanabbi had it, "This is a reproach against you, but it is an expression of love, inlaid with pearls, only they are words." At the end, Darwish was sanguine: "If you have looked at a rose without it causing you pain,/and you have rejoiced in it, say to your heart, *Thank you.*" ■

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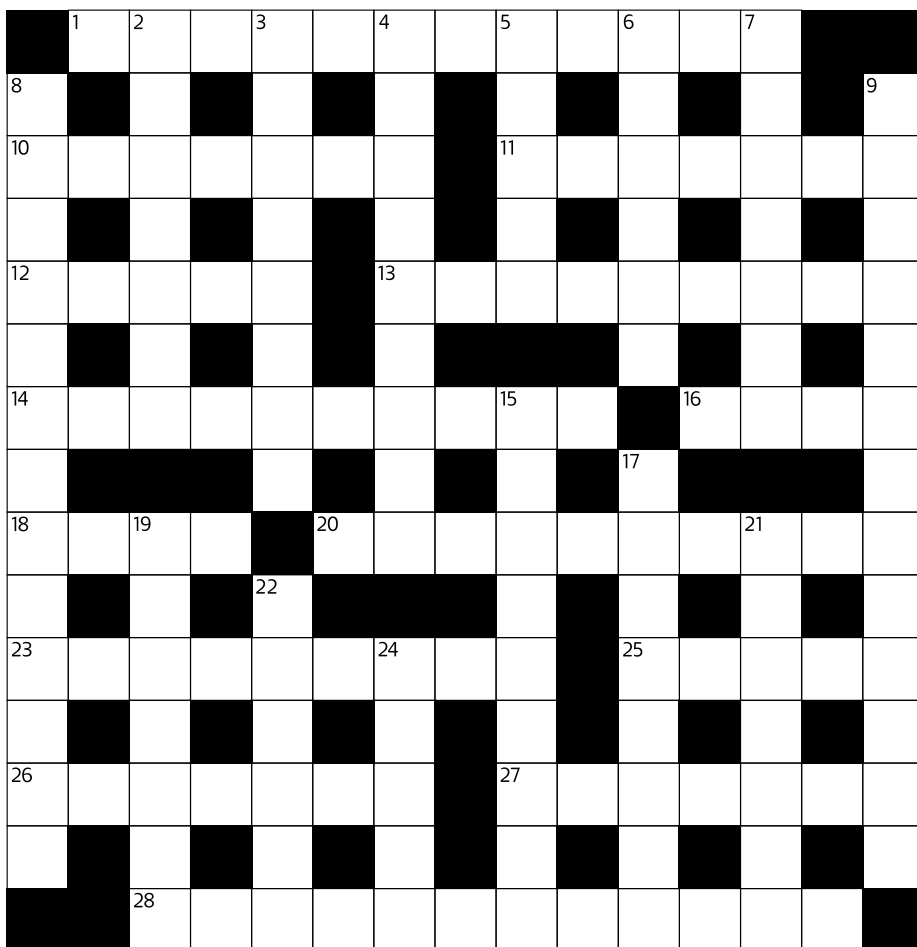
FRANK W. LEWIS

ACROSS

- 1 As they say, 22 and 24 down no matter how you slice it? (1,5,2,4)
- 10 You might find even it a rather childish quality. (7)
- 11 Entering—but no farther than this? The satin sofa really shows signs of it. (7)
- 12 Search around a place frequently visited by a ghost down south? (5)
- 13 Has left on the sort that makes prints, perhaps. (4-5)
- 14 Supportive—but just there in case of emergency? (8,2)
- 18 and 16 The abbreviated state attributed to Mr. Whittington? (A large and colorless example of literary fame.) (4-4)
- 20 More than cold, being from the Orient! (7,3)
- 23 Evidently things like pintos can be heard to show what Jack went up. (9)
- 25 String good fortune together, like the old composer. (5)
- 26 Part of a regular clam picnic—though some make light of it. (3,4)
- 27 I get such a long way behind time, put in quarantine! (7)
- 28 The first ingredient in the traditional plot—merely bigots making such. (3,5,4)

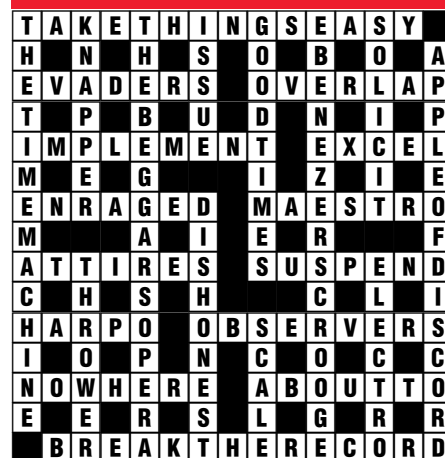
DOWN

- 2 Classically, the first flower of spring. (7)
- 3 Does it go in and out smoothly—especially late in the day? (8)
- 4 In Naples, the twisted trunks of them can send out a stream of water. (9)
- 5 Gathered at the edge of what might be a loud-sounding river. (5)
- 6 Like matching collections, these should prove valuable. (6)
- 7 Chopped up fine, and also fed by someone called this in the eastern Mediterranean. (7)
- 8 Port and starboard lights are usually found this way, where troubles are common. (2,3,4,4)
- 9 Would a commonly talked-of monkey have them on hand? (They should be both offensive and illegal.) (5,8)
- 15 Not the names mentioned in a white paper, though one could get it back still. (9)
- 17 Monotonous intonation, though many vocalists can do it well. (8)
- 19 Sounds “a little smoky” to carry a pitcher from Chicago, perhaps. (4,3)
- 21 A dirty song—or just what the boys in the smoke-filled room have to put up with? (4,3)
- 22 and 24 Just a simple custard implied, by comparison? (2,4,2,3)

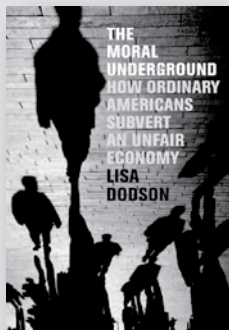


This puzzle originally appeared in the April 24, 1989, issue.

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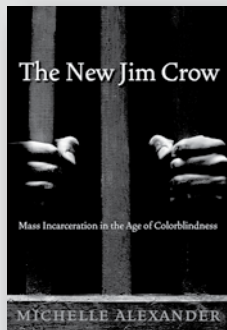
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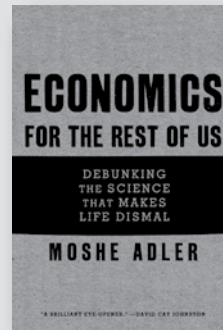
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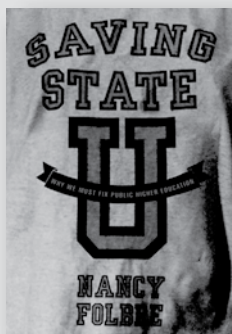
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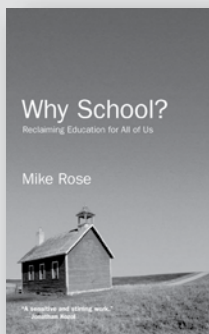
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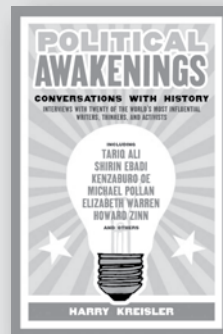


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